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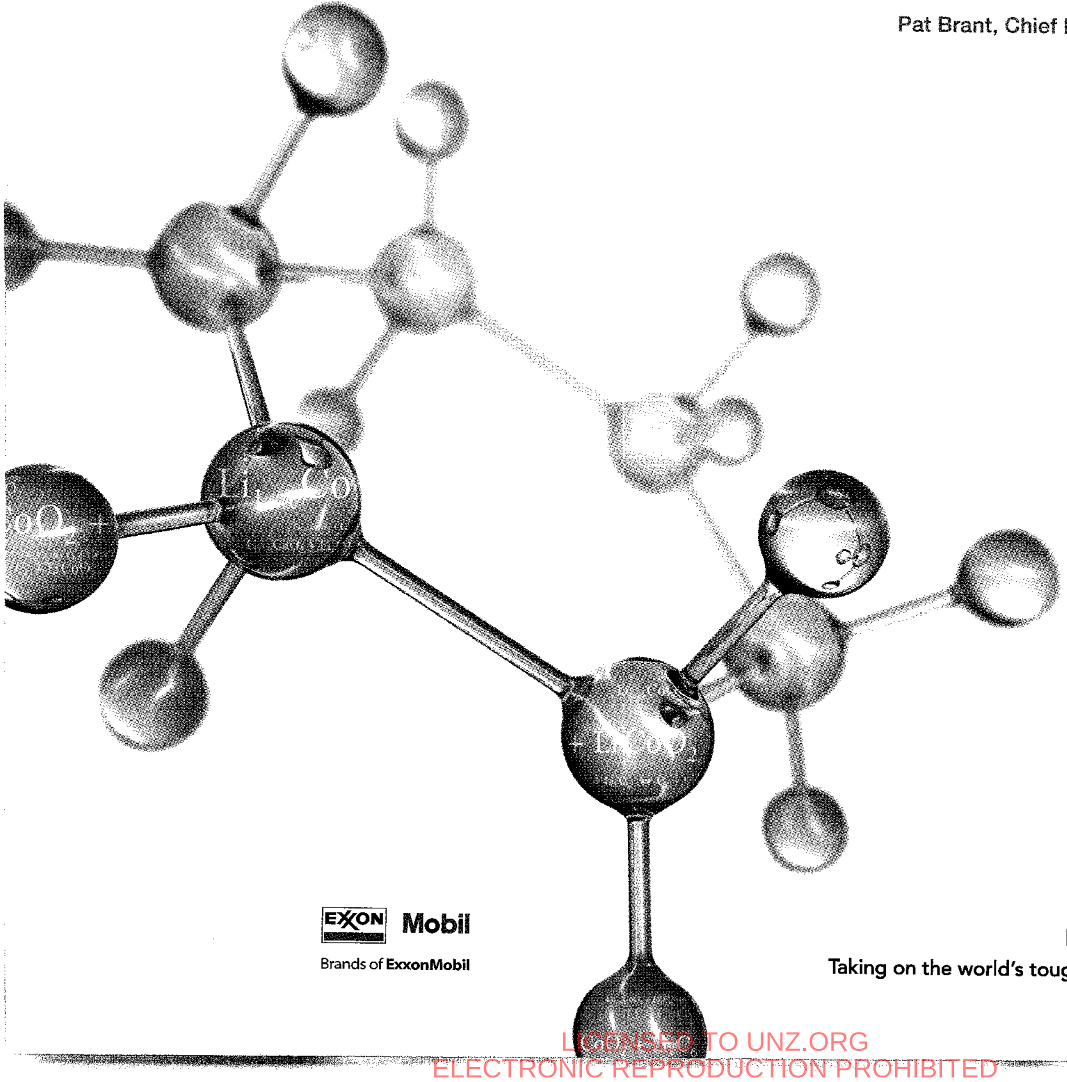

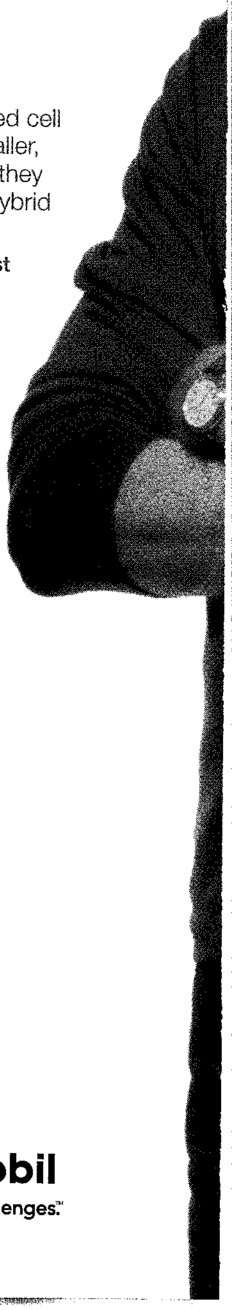

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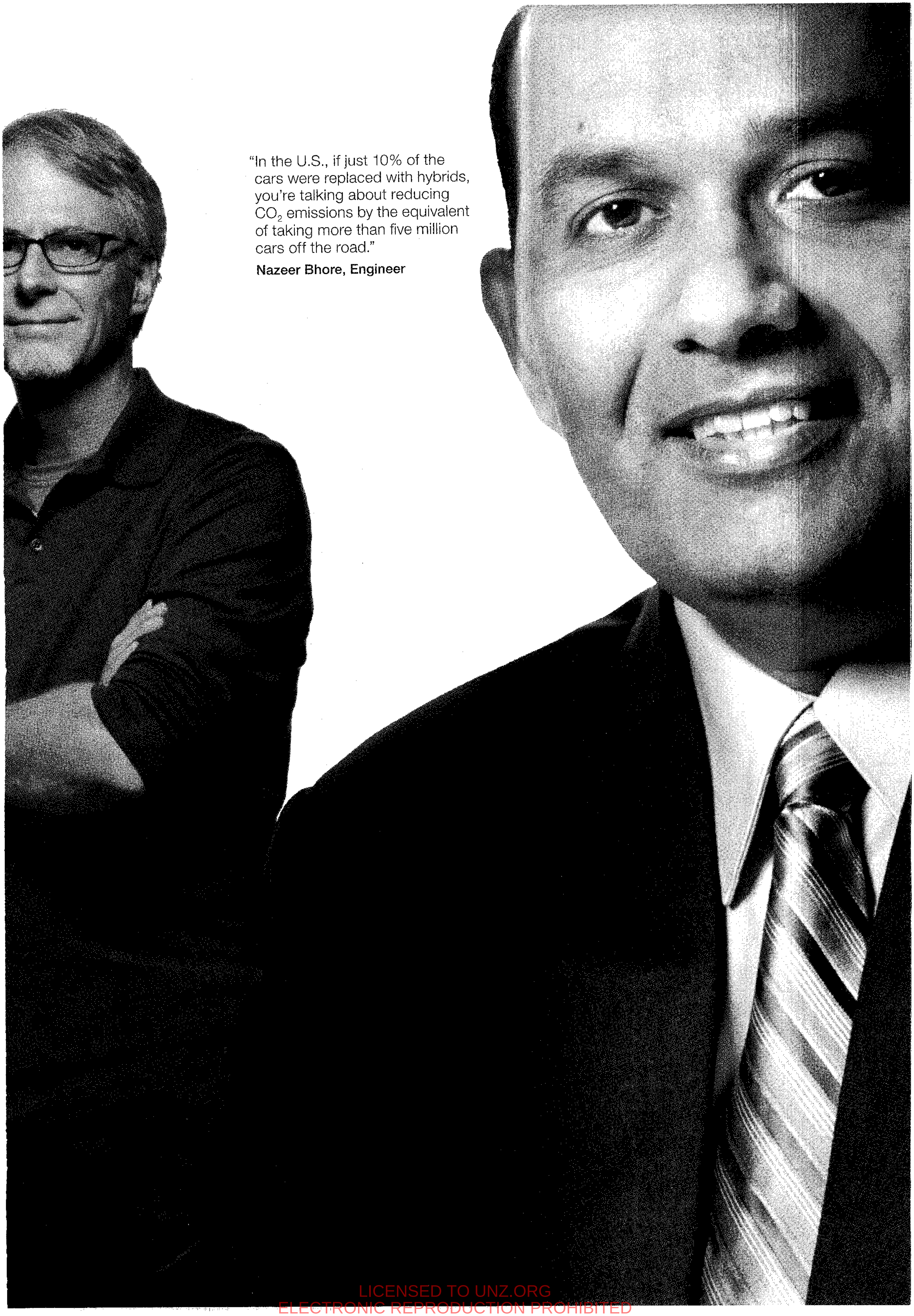

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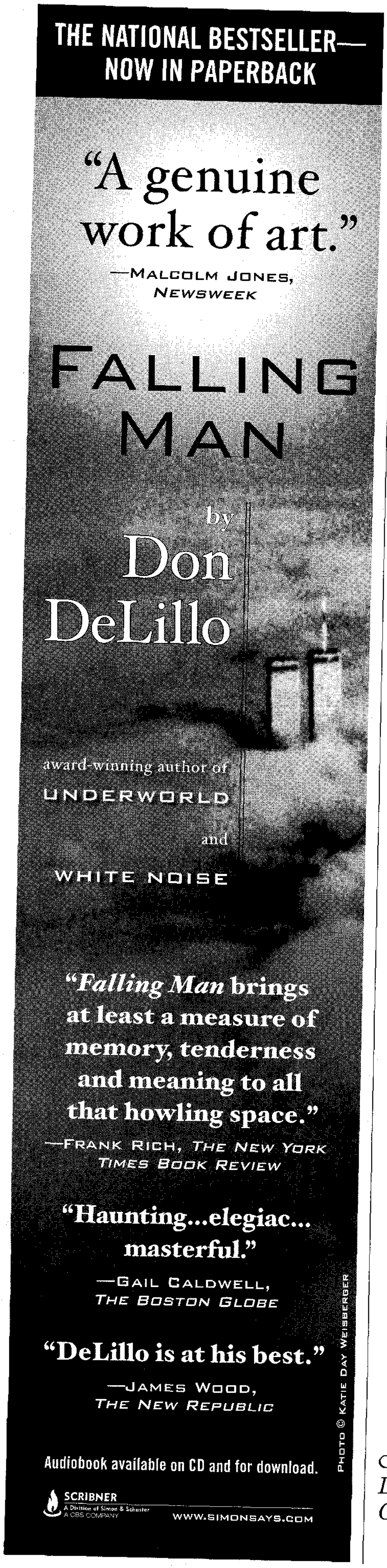
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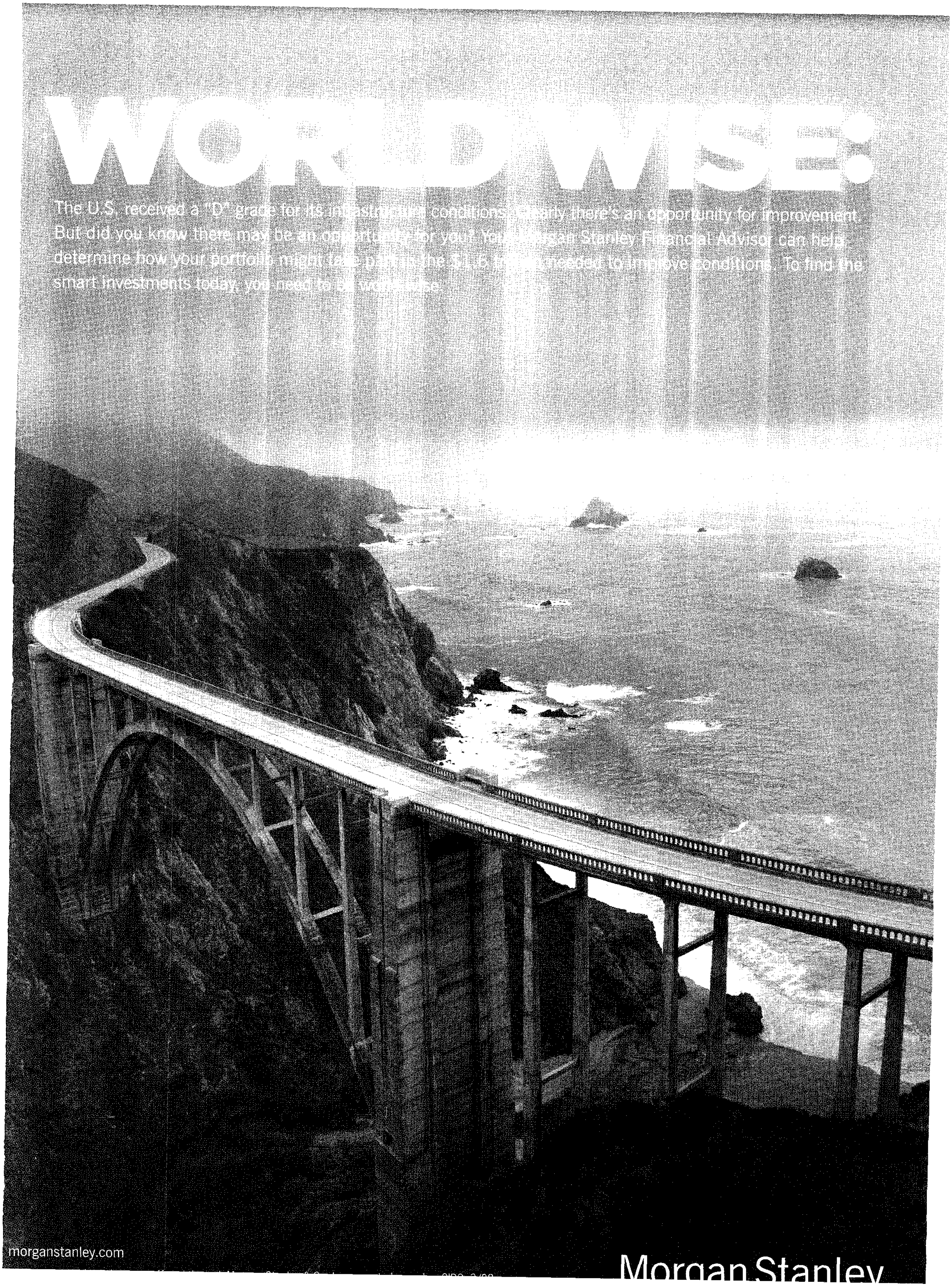

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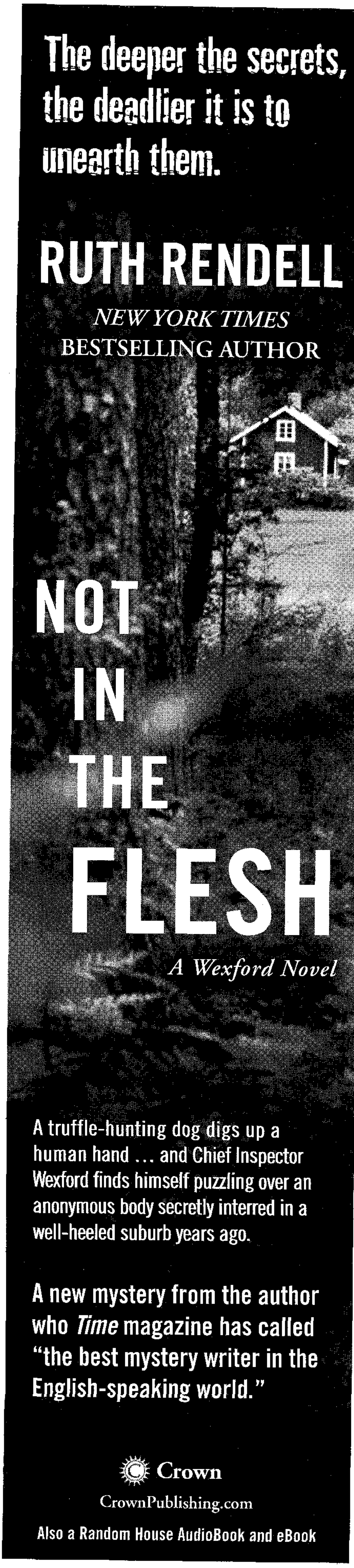

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RUTH RENDELL

NEW YORK TIMES
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Peter J. Boyer ("One Angry Man," p. 28) has been a staff writer since 1992.

Hendrik Hertzberg (Comment, p. 21) writes regularly about politics and policy. His book "Politics: Observations & Arguments" is available in paperback. He also writes a blog on newyorker.com.

George Saunders (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 36) teaches at Syracuse University. His most recent book is "The Braindead Megaphone," a collection of essays.

John Seabrook ("Hello, HAL," p. 38) is the author of "Flash of Genius: And Other True Stories of Invention," which will be published in September. The movie "Flash of Genius," based on his January, 1993, piece about the inventor Bob Kearns, comes out in October.

Ben McGrath (The Talk of the Town, p. 22) is a staff writer.

J. D. McClatchy (Poem, p. 54) is the author of six collections of poetry, including "Hazmat" and "Mercury Dressing," which will be published in January.

Bruce McCall (Cover) will publish his first children's book, "Marveltown," in October.

Jon Lee Anderson ("Fidel's Heir," p. 46) is the author of four books, including "Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life," which is available in paperback.

Judith Thurman ("First Impressions," p. 58) is the author of, most recently, "Cleopatra's Nose: 39 Varieties of Desire," a collection of her *New Yorker* essays.

Kevin Young (Poem, p. 62), who won the 2007 Quill Award in Poetry for his collection "For the Confederate Dead," has a new book of poems, "Dear Darkness," coming out in September.

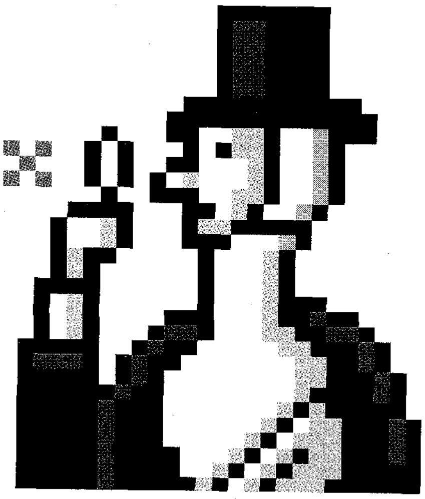
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Fiction, p. 68) has published two novels, "Purple Hibiscus" and "Half of a Yellow Sun." She has a collection of stories, "Do Butterflies Eat Ashes?," due out early next year.

Gary Giddins (Jazz, p. 76) teaches at the CUNY Graduate Center. "Natural Selection," his most recent book, comes out in paperback in September, and "Jazz," a history of jazz, co-written with Scott DeVeaux, will be published next year.

James Wood (Books, p. 79), a staff writer, is the author of "How Fiction Works," which will be published next month.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Audio: *John Cassidy, Ryan Lizza,* and *Dorothy Wickenden* discuss the candidates and the economy on the Campaign Trail podcast. / *Peter J. Boyer* talks about Keith Olbermann. / Photographs of Hugo Chávez by *Samantha Appleton.* / *Michael Crawford* is the Cartoonist of the Month. / Blogs: *Hendrik Hertzberg* on politics, *Sasha Frere-Jones* on music, the Book Bench, and Goings On. / From the archives: *Cynthia Zarin* on Olafur Eliasson, *David Denby* on Ang Lee's "Hulk," and thousands of book and movie reviews. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events.



THE MAIL

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHIES

George Packer's thoughtful article implies that conservatives will pay a steep price for their collective inability to evolve, and to let go of "the dogma of limited government," and quotes David Frum's assertion that conservatives "must prove that [they] care enough about government to manage it well" ("The Fall of Conservatism," May 26th). It seems to me, though, that conservatives have failed for the opposite reason: they have embraced the concept of big government with (ever-widening) open arms. Traditionally well-to-do and Christian, the governing conservatives who came of age at a time when the conservative movement was directed toward combatting the rise of social democracy, and who came to power at a time when the American people overwhelmingly approved of and relied on the modern state, appear to have enjoyed greatly their control of the government purse strings by doling out favors to oil executives and no-bid contracts to fat-cat cronies. In the end, although it is fair to say that corruption in government will exist no matter which party is in charge, I would rather not have to suffer the constant intellectual dishonesty and moral perversity of a governing élite that decries the alleged excesses of the welfare state for the strain it puts on America's gainfully employed, while openly and brazenly using the tax dollars of the many to maintain and increase the fortunes of the privileged few.

Jonathan H. Claydon
Chicago, Ill.

Packer's article omits a major reason for the success of the conservative movement over the past twenty-five years: great good luck. Reagan and his successors benefitted from low energy prices and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Neither of these phenomena is easily attributable to conservative policies. To the extent that American policies contributed to lower energy prices, it was because of energy-efficiency regulation supported by Democrats and moderate Republicans. A scholarly consensus has emerged that the containment policy developed by the liberal Truman Administration was a major factor in the demise of the Soviet Union, and that Reagan-era militarization played a relatively modest role. The contrast between what twentieth-century conservatism and liberalism have achieved is striking. In the face of, and partly because of, the challenges of the Great Depression, the Second World War, and the Cold War, liberals reshaped American society, inaugurating an era of unrivalled prosperity, expanded civil rights, vastly increased access to education, and American predominance in the Western world. Gifted with a series of enormous windfalls, conservatives have succeeded primarily in degrading the quality of American life.

Roger L. Albin
Ann Arbor, Mich.

At the bottom of William F. Buckley, Jr.,'s cry of "Stop" to American liberalism as he saw it sit two myths: the myth of America as an area of infinite open range and the myth of pure capitalism, both of which could be expected to be part of the inner mythology of someone who was born very rich in 1925, and whose parents may have seen Roosevelt and his reforms as class betrayal. The ability to manage large, condensed cities and "burbs" of all sorts, in which most of the residents of any particular developed country live, without falling into a totalitarian, "invisible hand" capitalist, monotheist, or mercantilist mode could be the next goal for any given political party. The myths never really were true, except in the eyes of true believers.

Kurt Cooper
Tucson, Ariz.

•

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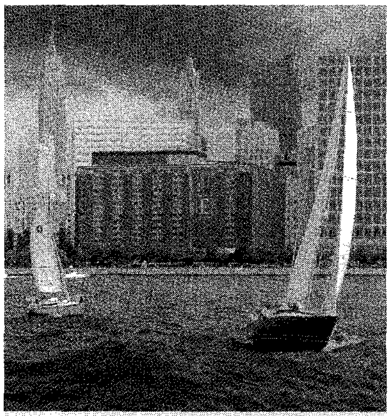

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The Coney Island Circus Sideshow. Photograph by Lisa Kereszi.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
22	23	24	18	19	20	21

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
TWISTED TUNER

The puppeteer Basil Twist collaborates with the performance artist Joey Arias—who once worked with the improv comedy troupe the Groundlings and does a mean Joan Crawford impression—for a puppet show with live music, "Arias with a Twist," at HERE Arts Center. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
FOUR HANDS

The JVC Jazz Festival honors the outré and the popular this year with separate shows by the pianists Cecil Taylor and Herbie Hancock. The thrilling free-jazz innovator Taylor, who is almost eighty, is making a rare solo appearance; the recent Grammy winner Hancock will interpret the compositions of Joni Mitchell. (See page 10.)

ART
THE BIG SLEEP

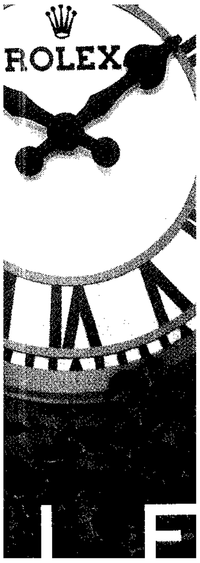
A small selection of pieces by the great Robert Rauschenberg, who died last month, at the age of eighty-two, is on view at MOMA, the first museum to acquire his work, in 1952. The show includes the iconic combine painting "Bed" (1955), for which Rauschenberg applied paint and pencil to a pillow, a quilt, and a sheet. (See page 10.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
GOLD STANDARD

The Grawemeyer Award, administered by the University of Louisville, is the closest thing that contemporary composers have to the Nobel Prize. The 2005 Grawemeyer went to the Queens-born George Tsontakis, for his radiant Violin Concerto No. 2; this week, the Riverside Symphony offers the New York première. (See page 12.)

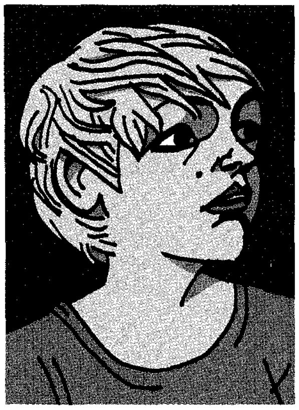
MOVIES
EAST IS EAST

The New York Asian Film Festival, which begins this week at the IFC Center, offers more than forty features from Japan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, and China. The program for the first week of the festival includes the Korean romantic drama "Happiness," the Hong Kong action film "Mad Detective," and "Assembly," a war movie about the Chinese revolution. (See page 15.)


ROLEX

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
YOUNG FOLK

When, like Laura Marling, you début as a singer and songwriter at sixteen, age will be part of the discussion for a while. Marling's album, "Alas I Cannot Swim," begs some of this talk. A slight, pale young woman from Eversley, England, Marling sometimes seems to be writing with a preëmptively jaded eye. (It's a bit early in the game for lines like "It's not like I believe in everlasting love," from "Ghosts.") Marling works in the bleak and articulate tradition of English folksingers like Richard Thompson and Anne Briggs, though I also hear the urgent cadence of Fiona Apple in several songs. One of Marling's gifts is an ability to find music in the rhythms of speech. Her songs don't moon or wobble; she sings like an interlocutor, usually schooling a difficult boy. "Thinking he knew where I was going, he put Ryan Adams on. I think he thinks it makes me weak—it only ever makes me strong" is a line from "New Romantic," an early song that is still part of her live set. Marling plays Mercury Lounge on June 18.



JASHAR AWAN

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ARIAS WITH A TWIST
Joey Arias and Basil Twist join forces to perform a multimedia puppet show with live music, at HERE Arts Center. Opens June 18. (145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101.)

BASH'D
A rap opera, written by and starring Chris Craddock and Nathan Cuckow (with music also by Aaron Macri), about a gay couple who retaliate when one of them is brutally beaten. Ron Jenkins directs. In previews. Opens June 23. (Zipper, 336 W. 37th St. 212-352-3101.)

BRUNCH AT THE LUTHERS
DADAnewyork performs this absurd comedy by the Israeli playwright Misha Shulman, about a middle-aged couple preparing for a brunch. Opens June 19. (Theatre for a New City, 155 First Ave. 212-254-1109.)

A BRUSH WITH GEORGIA O'KEEFFE
Robert Kalfin directs a drama about the life of O'Keeffe, including her relationship with Alfred Stieglitz, by Natalie Mosco. In previews. Opens June 21. (St. Luke's, 308 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200.)

CIRQUE DREAMS "JUNGLE FANTASY"
Neil Goldberg created and directs this spectacle, which features aerialists, contortionists, acrobats, jugglers, and musicians in a jungle setting. In previews. (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.)

MACBETH
Poland's TR Warszawa presents the Shakespeare tragedy, directed by Grzegorz Jarzyna, performed in a roofless theatre at the Tobacco Warehouse. A St. Ann's Warehouse production. In previews. Opens June 19. (Adjacent to the Empire-Fulton Ferry State Park, Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE AND BOO
Roundabout Theatre Company presents Christopher Durang's dark comedy, about a couple's long history of alcoholism and nervous breakdowns. Walter Bobbie directs. In previews. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

PALACE OF THE END
Epic Theatre Ensemble presents Judith Thompson's comic drama, about the Iraq war. Daniella Topol directs. In previews. Opens June 23. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE PASSION PROJECT
Reid Farrington, a video-installation artist and frequent collaborator with the Wooster Group, directs this piece, which incorporates clips of Carl Theodor Dreyer's 1928 film "The Passion of Joan of Arc." Opens June 19. (3LD Art & Technology Center, 80 Greenwich St. 212-352-3101.)

A PERFECT COUPLE
WET presents a play by Brooke Berman, about a couple who are getting married after many years together. Maria Mileaf directs. In previews. Opens June 19. (DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

STITCHING
Anthony Neilson wrote this play, about a couple who dabble in role-playing games. Timothy Haskell directs. In previews. Opens June 25. (Wild Project, 195 E. 3rd St. 212-352-3101.)

NOW PLAYING

BODY AWARENESS
A high-school teacher living in a Vermont college town thinks her awkward, dictionary-obsessed adult son might have Asperger's syndrome—a social disorder marked by an inability to empathize—and his only response is to threaten her life. Meanwhile, her girlfriend, a psychology professor at the university, is going crazy trying to organize Body Awareness Week, and her mental state is only exacerbated by the presence of a visiting artist, whose controversial photographs of women and questionable views of the human psyche threaten to uproot everyone's sense of self. Skillfully directed by Karen Kohlhaas, playwright Annie Baker's flawed but refreshingly intelligent Off Broadway début is an impressive and occasionally beautiful meditation on the mysteries of being moved. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 212-279-4200. Through June 22.)

EDWARD ALBEE'S OCCUPANT
Signature Theatre Company presents Edward Albee's 2002 work about the sculptor Louise Nevelson. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

HAMLET
Shakespeare in the Park opens with the tragedy, staged by Oskar Eustis (the artistic director of the Public) and starring Michael Stuhlbarg, Lauren Ambrose, Sam Waterston, and Margaret Colin. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park, near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-539-8750.)

JOLLYSHIP THE WHIZ-BANG
Irreverent punk perfection, care of Nick Jones and Raja Azar. Jones is both the front man of this swarthy human-and-puppet band and the voice of Captain Clamp, pirate extraordinaire, who looks like a green-faced cousin of Lady Elaine, from "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." Joined by a wily British crab and a bug-eyed first mate named Mr. Skeevy (Azar), Clamp sets off with his crew on a quest to the mythical Party Island. Along the way, he must overcome the hurdles of modern life, such as alcoholism and mutiny. Directed by Sam Gold, the troupe serves up demented comic bits punctuated by ecstatic rock songs with titles like "I Killed the Cabin Boy." If you've never seen a puppet do a keg stand, climb aboard. (Ars Nova, 511 W. 54th St. 212-868-4444.)

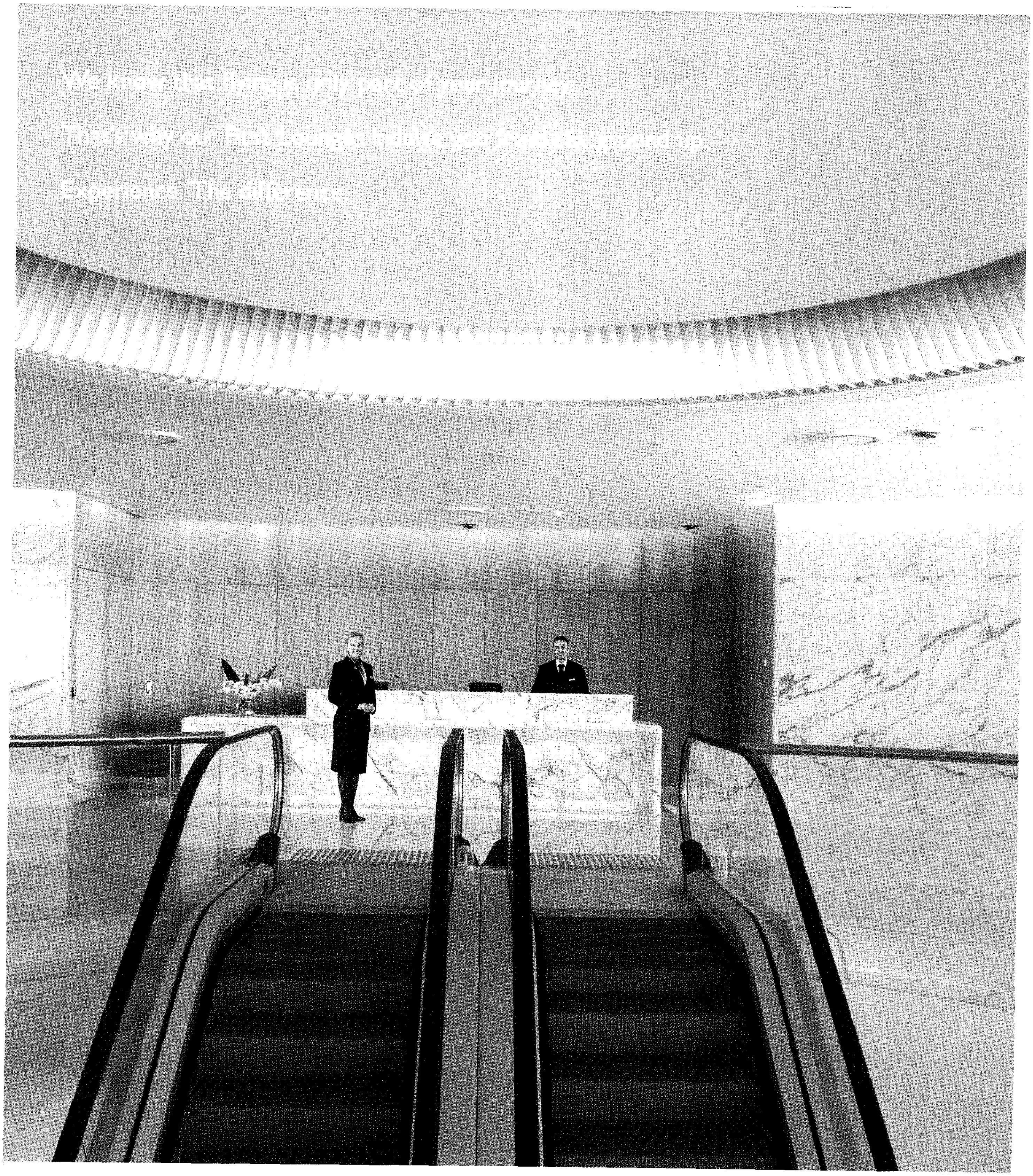
LEN, ASLEEP IN VINYL
Len (Michael Cullen), an aging record producer who seems to be perpetually on the verge of a nervous breakdown, has holed himself up in a secluded cabin in order to weather what seems to be the worst stretch of an ongoing midlife crisis. His attempts at soul-searching are thwarted by his needy hipster son and by his best-selling client, an awkwardly veiled parody of Britney Spears. Unfortunately, the production feels like a final project for an undergraduate drama class; talky and chock full of forced conflict and strained humor, the play, written by Carly Mensch, seems frustrated by the theatrical form, as though it would rather be a TV movie. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 212-246-4422. Through June 22.)

OPH3LIA
Aya Ogawa wrote and directed this drama inspired by the Hamlet character. (HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101.)

REASONS TO BE PRETTY
Neil LaBute's drama—the last in a trilogy about physical beauty—begins as Steph (the sweet-looking, fierce Alison Pill) reviles her longtime boyfriend, Greg (Thomas Sadoski), for calling her face, according to a secondhand account, ugly. Greg deals with the aftershocks of the ensuing breakup as he works the night shift at a superstore warehouse; meanwhile, his volatile co-worker Kent (the outstanding Pablo Schreiber) tries to finagle both Greg and his own wife, Carly (Piper Perabo), a pretty security guard at the warehouse, into remaining enamored with him despite his erratic behavior. LaBute eschews his usual tack—laying on the meanness so thick that the audience is bullied into feeling the hurt of it—for a gentler approach that includes confessional monologues for each character. While the intention is appreciated, the explication is overkill; but the fantastic cast, well directed by Terry Kinney, brings nuance and depth, and just the right note of darkness, to LaBute's softer side. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

SAFE
At Studio Dante, Zetna Fuentes directs a drama by Ron Fitzgerald, about three strangers who bond as they attempt to run from their troubles. (257 W. 29th St. 212-868-4444.)

SAVED
The 2004 film that inspired this musical (by John Dempsey, Michael Friedman, and Rinne Groff) had a great comic premise: at a Christian high school, the Bible-addled teens must cope with the same hor-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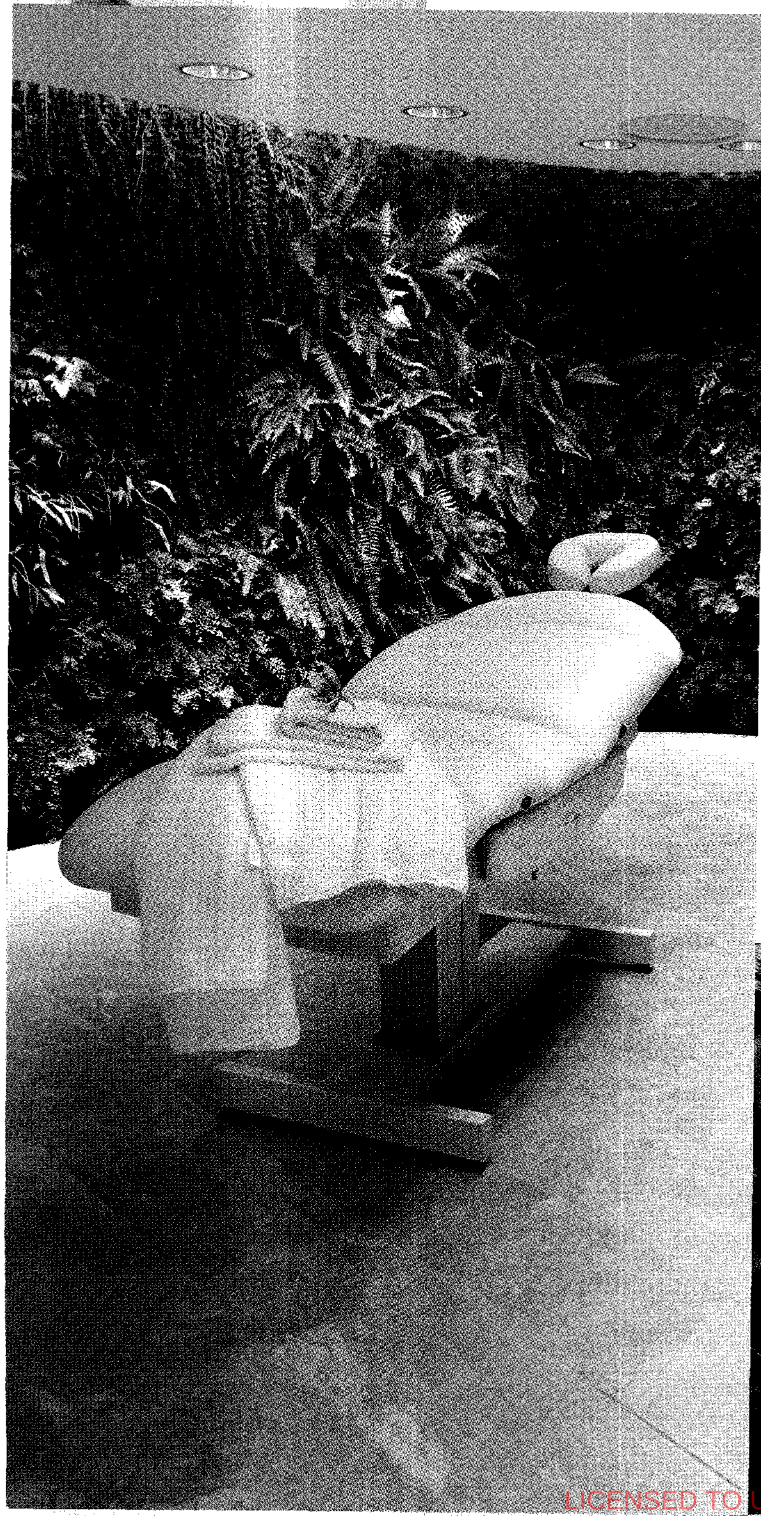

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mones, petty rivalries, and romantic imbroglios as their secular counterparts. The creators of the musical have softened the movie's sarcastic edge for the sake of psychological nuance, a trade-off that isn't entirely gainful. Not only does Mary (Celia Keenan-Bolger)—a good girl who encounters a crisis of faith when her boyfriend tells her he's gay—elaborate her feelings in song; the pastor, the popular girl, and even the freaky outcast also have moments of introspection. Although the cast, directed by Gary Griffin, makes a winning case for our sympathies, it becomes unclear whether the piece is still grounded in satire at all. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through June 22.)

OUT OF TOWN

BAY STREET THEATRE
Charles Busch stars in his farce "Shanghai Moon," in which a married Englishwoman gets involved with a Chinese warlord. Carl Andress directs. For more information, visit www.baystreet.org. (Sag Harbor, N.Y. 631-725-9500.)

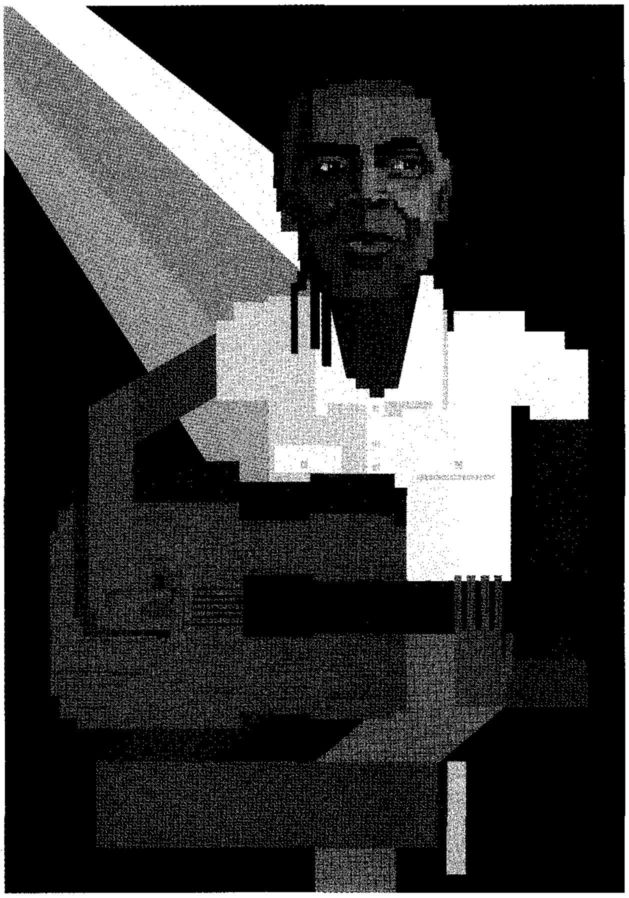
BERKSHIRE THEATRE FESTIVAL
Eric Hill directs Harold Pinter's "The Caretaker," from 1960, starring James Barry and Jonathan Epstein, and Anders Cato directs George Bernard Shaw's 1894 comedy, "Candida," about a poet who comes between a minister and his wife. For more information, visit www.berkshiretheatre.org. (Stockbridge, Mass. 413-298-5576.)

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
"Cymbeline," directed by Terrence O'Brien, plays on the tented outdoor stage at Boscobel. "Twelfth Night" begins performances June 18. For more information, visit www.hvshakespeare.org. (Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575.)

WILLIAMSTOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL
Alex Timbers directs "Beyond Therapy," Christopher Durang's play, set in the eighties, about self-obsessed singles looking for love, on the Nikos Stage through June 22. For a full festival schedule, visit www.wtfestival.org. (Williamstown, Mass. 413-597-3400.)

Also Playing

ADDING MACHINE: Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Imperial, 245 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BOEING-BOEING:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **A CATERED AFFAIR:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COUNTRY GIRL:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **CRY-BABY:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-1400. **GREASE:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **GYPSY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **HOW THEATER FAILED AMERICA:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. Through June 22. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **THE LITTLE MERMAID:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747. **NOVEMBER:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **PASSING STRANGE:** Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **RAFTA, RAFTA . . .:** Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **THURGOOD:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **TOP GIRLS:** Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **XANADU:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.



Gilberto Gil visits the Nokia Theatre Times Square.

TOMBY

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—June 18: **Fish.** In the early eighties, Marillion defied the era's trends by taking its cues from Yes, the Peter Gabriel-led incarnation of Genesis, and other prog-rock juggernauts. At the time, Marillion's lead singer was a burly Scotsman who went by the name Fish (actual name: Derek Dick). Fish's theatrical stage presence and dramatic vocals lent the band some distinction, but he left the fold toward the end of the decade, after it scored its biggest hit with the pop ballad "Kayleigh." Marillion now has a new singer, and Fish has pursued a solo career that retains his histrionic flair. June 19: The rappers **Raekwon** and **Cappadonna,** from the Wu-Tang Clan. June 24: **Salif Keita,** the Malian singer who first achieved renown with the folk-rumba group Les Ambassadeurs, has become one of West Africa's most popular musical exports.

BEACON THEATRE
Broadway at 74th St. (212-307-7171)—June 17-18 and June 20-21: The jazz-rock institution **Steely Dan,** which defined sophistication in the seventies and has endured to the present day.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—June 18: The **Ting Tings,** a male-female British duo with an often stickily sweet pop sound, have had a hit song in England, "That's Not My Name," and another song featured in an iPod commercial, "Shut Up and Let Me Go." June 19-20: The long-running Canadian rock band **Sloan** can always be counted on for an evening of quality power pop.

CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!
Prospect Park Band Shell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. (718-855-7882, ext. 45)—June 19: The JVC Jazz Festival presents the hometown heroes **Medeski Martin & Wood;** the guitarist **Marc Ribot** and his fearsome power trio, Ceramic Dog; and the beat-boxer **Taylor McFerrin** and his band the Cell Theory. June 22: **Salif Keita** (see the B. B. King Blues Club & Grill). With the Persian-American rocker **Haale.**

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-360-2777)—June 22: The slender-voiced singer **Yael Naim,** who was born in Paris and raised in Israel, is best known for her song "New Soul," which, thanks to its use in a television commercial for a Mac, has made her a star. With the singer-songwriter **Piers Faccini.** An Englishman who grew up in France and still lives there, Faccini favors the global approach to the blues popularized by the likes of Jack Johnson and Ben Harper. Also on the bill is the clever and adorable local anti-folk group **Herman Düne.**

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—June 18: The neo-soul superstar **Alicia Keys.** June 19: **R.E.M.,** the pride of Athens, Georgia, has restored the good name of jangle pop with its new album, the hard-rocking (if somewhat backward-looking) "Accelerate." June 20: The **Cure** (see Radio City Music Hall). June 24: Nearly two decades ago, **Pearl Jam's** earnest, melodic grunge bluster and photogenic charisma earned them magazine covers and regular MTV rotation. Since then, the band has pursued one of the more mercurial yet prolific careers of its generation.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—June 18: The **Retribution Gospel Choir** is the latest work of Alan Sparhawk, of Low. Unlike that Duluth group, which takes a minimalist approach, R.G.C. rocks out with relative abandon. With the up-and-coming English folkie **Laura Marling.**

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—June 22: As is becoming customary for bands of a certain generation, the CBGB alumni **Blondie** are celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of a watershed release, "Parallel Lines." The band, which still features the guitarist Chris Stein, the powerhouse drummer Clem Burke, and the iconic lead singer Deborah Harry, will be performing the entirety of its 1978 album, which includes the timeless single "Heart of Glass." June 24: The Brazilian musician **Gilberto Gil** has been a protest singer, an exile, and a government official (he's currently the minister of culture). Last year he toured the States solo. He's back now with a new group, BroadBand Band, a new album, "Banda Larga Cordel," and a not-so-new attitude toward technology; he was an early adopter of the Internet, and he's encouraging his fans to record his concert appearances.

NYC ROCKIN' THE RIVER CRUISES
June 19: The summer-concert season on the high seas (or at least scenic New York Harbor) gets under way in earnest with a visit from **Buckwheat Zydeco.** With **Nathan & the Zydeco Cha Chas.** (For more information, visit www.rtrcruises.com.)

PETE'S CANDY STORE
709 Lorimer St., Williamsburg (718-302-3770)—June 19: **Mike Edison,** a colorful character whose résumé includes stints editing wrestling, drug, and pornography magazines, and who has just published a memoir, "I Have Fun Everywhere I Go," is also a multi-instrumentalist with, as might be expected by a man with his experience, a bunch of slick rocker friends.

A few of them, including **Jon Spencer** and **Hollis Queens** (of Boss Hogg) are backing him here in a trippy spoken-word performance.

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL
Sixth Ave. at 50th St. (212-247-4777)—June 20: The Louisville ensemble **My Morning Jacket,** known for crafting shaggy Southern rock, freaks out on its new record, "Evil Urges," which embraces everything from arena-ready ballads to funky R. & B. June 21: One of the most enduring pop acts of the eighties, the **Cure** still piles on the smudged lipstick and hair spray and keeps making enticing music; it is poised to release its thirteenth album in September. The ever stylishly bedraggled Robert Smith remains a hero to hopeless romantics everywhere.

TOWN HALL
123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—June 18-19: **Emmylou Harris,** who was recently inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame, serves up songs from her new album, "All I Intended to Be."

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—June 21: **Richard Cheese & Lounge Against the Machine** are a charming novelty outfit specializing in cheeky, cocktail-lounge-ready renditions of contemporary rock favorites. Last year it aimed its swanky shtick at popular TV-show themes with the album "Dick at Nite," and it's currently pushing a lounge-friendly cover of the "Indiana Jones" theme. You've been warned.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—**Phoebe Snow,** who broke the ice here last October with her first local club appearance in nearly two decades, settles in for the early shows June 17-22. Her presence on the charts ended, for the most part, in the seventies, but her vigor and vocal skills endure.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—June 17-22: The guitarist **John Scofield** bulks up the seasoned trio he shares with the bassist **Steve Swallow** and the drummer **Bill Stewart** by adding the ScoHorns to the band.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—June 17-22: The legendary saxophonist **Lee Konitz** leads a fortified quintet with such trusted collaborators as the guitarist **Peter Bernstein,** the bassist **Ray Drummond,** and the drummer **Matt Wilson.**

FEINSTEIN'S AT LOEWS REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—June 17-28: The singer and actress **Liz Callaway** is in a nostalgic mood; her show "The Beat Goes On" revisits classic pop songs from the sixties by the likes of **Jimmy Webb** (who will join her on opening night), Burt Bacharach, and Brian Wilson.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—June 18-22: The pianist **Kenny Werner** welcomes the venerated harmonica virtuoso **Toots Thielemans** to his trio. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—June 19-22: **Dafnis Prieto,** an in-demand drummer with exceptional abilities, leads his own sextet. June 23: Picking up where Toots Thielemans (see Iridium, above) leaves off, **Grégoire Maret,** here duetting with the pianist **Andy Milne,** brings a contemporary slant to the jazz harmonica.

JVC JAZZ FESTIVAL
Two venues make their festival débuts this year. Downtown, (Le) Poisson Rouge, a new Bleecker Street club in the spot that once housed the legendary Village Gate, opens its doors to **Charlie Haden's Quartet West,** on June 18, and **Bill Frisell's** trio, on June 19. Uptown, the New York Society for Ethical Culture welcomes **Cecil Taylor** and **George Cables,** in an evening of solo piano, on June 20. There's also a tribute there to the nonagenarian pianist **Hank Jones** on June 21. Other notable shows include those at Carnegie Hall, featuring performances by the soul singer **Jill Scott** (June 20); the bossa-nova titan **João Gilberto** (June 22); and **Herbie Hancock's** salute to Joni Mitchell (June 23); as well as **Brad Mehldau,** who will be holding court with his trio downstairs at Zankel Hall (June 22). (For more information, visit www.festivalnetwork.com. Through June 28.)

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—June 17-22: The inventive drummer **Brian Blade** draws from uncommon musical sources with his Fellowship Band; its new album, "Season of Changes," finds key spots for **Kurt Rosenwinkel's** guitar and **Jon Cowherd's** keyboards. The group here is rounded out by the saxophonists **Melvin Butler** and **Myron Walden** and the bassist **Doug Weiss.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Superheroes: Fashion and Fantasy."** Through Sept. 1. ♦ **"Medieval and Renaissance Treasures from the Victoria and Albert Museum."** Through Aug. 17. ♦ **"Framing a Century: Master Photographs, 1840-1940."** Through Sept. 1. ♦ **"Jeff Koons on the Roof."** Through Oct. 26. ♦ **"Tiepolo Drawings from the Robert Lehman Collection."** Through Aug. 17. ♦ **"Radiance from the Rain Forest: Featherwork in Ancient Peru."** Through Sept. 1. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson."** Through June 30. ♦ **"A Memorial Installation of Works by Robert Rauschenberg."** Through June 23. ♦ **"Glossolalia: Languages of Drawing."** Through July 7. ♦ **"Projects 87: Sigalit Landau."** Through July 28. ♦ **"Geometry of Motion 1920s/1970s."** Through June 23. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"New York in the 1940s: Selections from the Collection."** Through Sept. 8. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Polaroids: Mapplethorpe."** Through Sept. 7. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"© Murakami."** Through July 13. ♦ **"Ghada Amer: Love Has No End."** Through Oct. 19. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"The Horse."** Through Jan. 4, 2009. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Ardeshir Mohassess: Art and Satire in Iran."** A giant rose blooms from a woman's burka; two men with severed arms and feet face off; figures stand erect despite their bleeding bullet holes. These are some of the subjects of Mohassess's ink illustrations, created during the last three decades. "I am only a reporter," he has claimed, but the Iranian draftsman's allegorical depictions of power, violence, and censorship offer something richer and more subjectively complex than simple reportage. His work is stylistically arresting—a cross between Edward Gorey's macabre illustrations and the lush delicacy of Persian miniatures. After Mohassess was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, in the eighties, he turned to smaller, more minimal drawings and collages, a dramatic stylistic shift that occurs midway through this revelatory show. Through Aug. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976."** More a perambulatory essay than an art show, "Action/Abstraction" employs paintings by Pollock, de Kooning, Newman, Rothko, and other members of American art's greatest generation to illustrate the clash of the movement's two major critics: Harold Rosenberg, who promoted the new art as existentialist drama, and Clement Greenberg, who exalted formal invention as an end in itself. Both men, born to Jewish immigrants in New York, were public intellectuals in the post-Marxist mold of the *Partisan Review*. They contested a throne of high-cultural authority which turned out not to exist. Film clips display their panache: Greenberg incisive and imperious, Rosenberg droll and oracular. In a way, each was an Abstract Expressionist in prose, addressing art's historical mission as ambitiously as the artists they heralded. Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Warhol's Jews: Ten Portraits Reconsidered."** Through Aug. 13. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Philip Guston: Works on Paper."** Through Aug. 31. ♦ **"Illuminating the Medieval Hunt."** Through Aug. 10. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Paul Chan: The 7 ~~Lights~~."** Through June 29. ♦ **"Tomma Abts."** Through June 29. ♦ **"Double Album: Daniel Guzmán and Steven Shearer."** Through July 6. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"Plague in Gotham!: Cholera in Nineteenth-Century New York."** When a deadly cholera epidemic swept the city in 1832, it was thought to have been caused by "miasmas," noxious vapors rising from rotting organic matter, and was ascribed to bad behavior by the intemperate and the poor. Period posters on view here describe such questionable-sounding cures as laudanum, mercury, laxatives, enemas, and poultices. Horatio Bartley's "Illustrations of Cholera Asphyxia in Its Different Stages" demonstrates the disease's gruesome effects. Asher B. Durand's portrait of his children in bucolic New Jersey shows how the middle and upper classes dealt with the epidemic (by escaping to the country), while George Whiting Flagg's portrait of a nun depicts a concerned member of the Catholic community ministering to the sick. Through Nov. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson."** Through June 30. ♦ **"Arctic Hysteria: New Art from Finland."** Through Sept. 15. ♦ **"That Was Then . . . This Is Now."** Opens June 22. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

CATHERINE MURPHY
Murphy's paintings of domestic subjects achieve a serene uncanniness. In one, Christmas lights frame a dark square of bare trees; in another, a sleeping figure burrows under a striped comforter, converting it into an undulating abstraction. The foreground of a third is dominated by two red blankets; they part to reveal a couple picnicking in a leafy yard, transforming the top of the picture plane into a de-facto clothesline. A grisaille drawing of a blistered cake in a shadowy oven

could be a memento mori for the Martha Stewart set. Through Aug. 1. (Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 212-794-0550.)

Short List

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON / HELEN LEVITT: Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930. Through Aug. 14. **JESS:** De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-262-5050. Through July 31. **SAUL LEITER:** Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010. Through June 21. **TOMOKO SAWADA:** Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 212-752-1223. Through June 27.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

SALLY GALL
Like a kid daydreaming in a field of wildflowers, Gall, a photographer, portrays nature as a marvellous, private wonderland. Her color pictures are closeups taken just above ground level, where a blade of grass looms as tall as a skyscraper and it's possible to imagine taking shelter under a dead leaf. Spiders, grasshoppers, caterpillars, and other bugs crawl through this lush green world, always sharply picked out against backgrounds that swoon into soft-focus impressionism. The insects are the unlikely stars of the show, our avatars in the undergrowth, showing us the way back to the garden. Through June 28. (Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410.)

LAURIE SIMMONS
Simmons's early photographs of doll-house figures and furniture remain among her most resonant images. This group of fifty-six small-scale black-and-white pictures, all made between 1976 and 1978, revolves around a prim female figure in a series of toy interiors, and touches, lightly, on issues of women's work and the prison of domesticity. When this stoic Everywoman flips upside-down in her kitchen, is she desperate or exuberant? Tellingly, even when the figure is absent, the sparsely decorated rooms cry out for attention. Through June 28. (Nitsch, 534 W. 22nd St. 212-645-2030.)

ALISON ELIZABETH TAYLOR
Taylor's wood-inlay "paintings" portray hipsters taking a dip, bicycling, and lounging outside a geodesic dome (one piece is titled "Fucminster Buller," lest you miss the point). The show's centerpiece is a room-size installation, which takes the Metropolitan Museum's marquetry "Studiolo from the Ducal Palace in Gubbio" (ca. 1478-82) as its inspiration—but the objects depicted here aren't Renaissance books, or musical and scientific instruments, but, rather, a microwave, a gun rack, and windows that overlook a construction site in the desert. Taylor's technique dazzles, but her off-the-grid subject matter feels forced, nearly as arid as the windows' trompe-l'oeil views. Through June 21. (Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500.)

CHRISTOPHER WOOL
Wool, the silkiest of painting-is-dead painters, has worked through motifs of block-lettered words and wallpaper patterns to his present phase of generic slash-and-splotch abstraction, in grisaille. The exceedingly handsome work masters a hard challenge: how to generate meaningful-seeming marks while obviously—dramatically, even—meaning nothing. The effect is like Beethoven played expertly on a kazoo. One at a time, the new Wools beguile. Seen together, they become rather too much of a gratuitously sophisticated thing. Through June 21. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)

"THE VIEW FROM HERE"
This exhibition of preparatory works by three artists suggests that a process can be more provocative than its final result. The two photographers stand out with black-and-white Polaroids of the sort that the manufacturer will soon render obsolete. Dan Estabrook, whose photographs and drawings look like they were made at least a century ago, shows studies for academic subjects—nude male and female torsos, a man in a top hat, an urn—that have the vaguely uncanny aura of magicians' props. Carrie Levy's tightly cropped pictures of naked men, most faced away from her camera, are charged with a fine tension that's more neurotic than erotic. Through June 21. (Cooney, 511 W. 25th St. 212-255-8158.)

ANA JUAN

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

"NEW YORK COOL"
The show snapshoots the New York art scene of the late fifties and early sixties from a downtown angle, embedded in studio communities of artists including de Kooning, Guston, Rauschenberg, Johns, Mitchell, Frankenthaler, Noland, Katz, and several who are now discounted and obscure. It was the bohemian twilight of gestural painting, alcohol, and jazz, about to end in the minimalist, stoned, mass-everything sixties. A moody tang reanimates even minor works—a painting by Al Held, a sculpture by Louise Nevelson. Some twenty "Poem-Paintings," tossed off in a day in 1962 by Frank O'Hara and Norman Bluhm, inflict sharp nostalgia with the valiant insouciance of (to quote O'Hara) "air becoming no air becoming air again." Through July 19. (Grey Art Gallery, 100 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-6780.)

Short List

STEVE DIBENEDETTO: Nolan, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-925-6190. Through June 21. **FRANCISCO DE GOYA:** Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441. Through Aug. 1. **LALEH KHORRAMIAN:** Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400. Through July 12. **YOLA MONAKHOV:** Wolf, 10 Leonard St. 212-925-0025. Through June 21.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
In the penultimate week of its spring season, the company introduces its final Robbins program, a double bill of themes and variations. "The Goldberg Variations," a monumental work set to Bach's sprawling masterpiece for keyboard, is one of Robbins's most abstract compositions. In "Brahms/Handel," his collaboration with Twyla Tharp, the two choreographers not only comment on the structure of the music but also riff on each other and, through the use of clever quotations, on the company's repertoire. This week also marks Damian Woetzel's retirement, after twenty-three years with the company. ♦ June 18 at 7:30 (Woetzel Farewell): "Fancy Free," "Rubies," and "Prodigal Son." ♦ June 19 at 8 and June 24 at 7:30: "Thou Swell," "Prodigal Son," and "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet." ♦ June 20-21 at 8: "Mozartiana," "Le Tombeau de Couperin," "Divertimento from 'Le Baiser de la Fée,' " and "La Sonnambula." ♦ June 21 at 2: "Dances at a Gathering," "Other Dances," and "The Concert." ♦ June 22 at 3: "The Goldberg Variations" and "Brahms/Handel." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through June 29.)

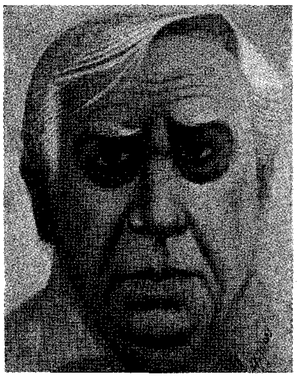
AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE
Last year's new production of the Tchaikovsky ballet "The Sleeping Beauty"—staged by Kevin McKenzie, Gelsey Kirkland, and her husband, Michael Chernov—was disappointing in its ill-conceived additions, overblown sets, and laborious characterizations. Even so, it had its moments, and since then it has gone through a series of changes, big and small: sets and costumes have been adjusted, more of the original choreography has been restored, and, most important, cuts have been made. On Thursday, the lovely Sarah Lane will dance the Princess Aurora role with the dazzling Herman Cornejo as the faithful prince. ♦ June 17 and June 19-20 at 8 and June 18 and June 21 at 2 and 8: "The Sleeping Beauty." ♦ June 23-24 at 8: "La Bayadère." (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000. Through July 12.)

"THE FRENCH COLLECTION"
In Compagnie Maguy Marin's "Umwelt" ("Environment"), dancers disappear behind mirrored slats, people speak, and the stage is littered with the leftovers of the dancers' various mundane activities. Next up is Ballet Biarritz, directed by Thierry Malandain, with

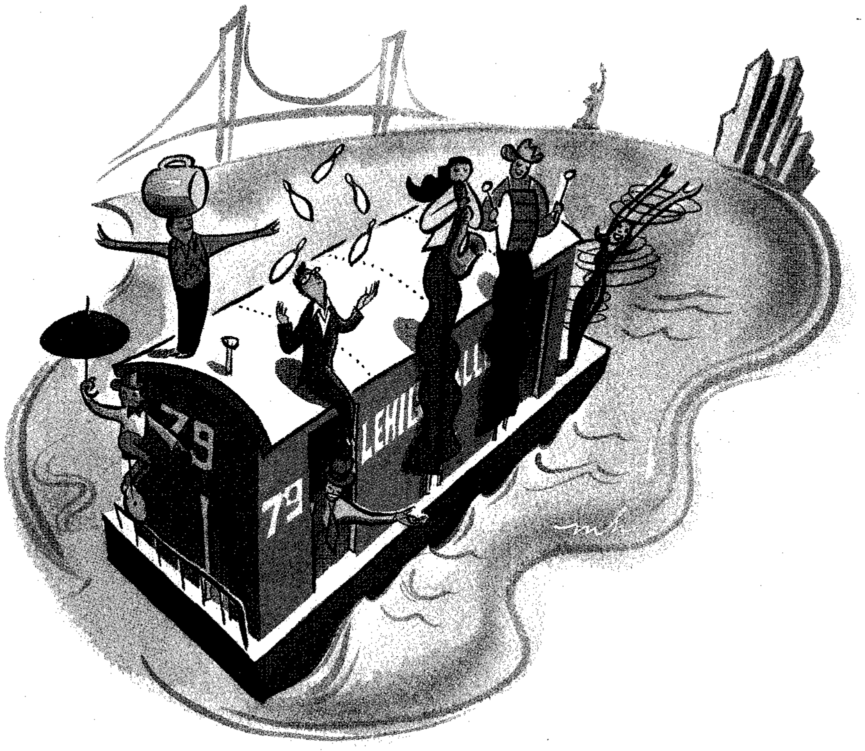
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
BETTER LATE

A show of drawings by Philip Guston at the Morgan Library and Museum packs a punch as ostensibly rough and actually exquisite as any one of the renegade Abstract Expressionist's late, cartoonish images: slovenly still-lifes, geeky characters, chiliastic floods. Something has happened to those pictures lately—they've grown steadily, stealthily greater since Guston's death, in 1980. His climactic style now appears canonical, lording over other art of the late twentieth century as a consummation (and consumption, bonfire-fashion) of modern art. His earlier, abstract drawings, esteemed for their aching sensitivity, impress now as demonstrations of ways to hesitate, poignantly, on the verge of a leap into personal candor and historical truth. His great subject turned out to be the collision of his masochistically vaulting artistic ambition (Piero della Francesca was his ideal) and his life as a doubt-ridden, suffering man. Tropes lifted from cartoonists, notably George Herriman, enabled a marriage of high and low, reason and squalor, which amounts to a beautiful joke that's as big as the world.

—*Peter Schjeldahl*



"L'Amour Sorcier," inspired by Manuel de Falla's 1915 ballet, a story of love and death among the Gypsies. In "Le Portrait de l'Infante," which looks back to the paintings of Diego Velázquez, Malandain combines the theatricality and eclecticism of modern dance with a Gallic sensuality. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Compagnie Maguy Marin: June 17-18 at 7:30, June 19-20 at 8, June 21 at 2 and 8, and June 22 at 2. Ballet Biarritz: June 24 at 7:30. Through June 28.)



"Circus Sundays," at the Waterfront Museum and Showboat Barge, in Red Hook.

DOORKNOB COMPANY
As part of the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's "Sitelines" series, the theatrical troupe run by Shannon Gillen and Elizabeth Motley stages a funeral for optimism. (Bowling Green Park at Cobblestone Plaza. 212-219-9401. June 17-19 and June 23-26 at 12:30.)

DUŠAN TÝNEK DANCE THEATRE
For its fifth season, the company of the Czech-born choreographer makes a dance venue out of the converted bathhouse known as the Brooklyn Lyceum. Týnek's new "Apian Way," set to Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin, seems larger than its cast of seven (which includes Týnek). It's full of breath and Baroque joy, its balleticized folk-dance patterns and daisy chains tweaked by quirky spasms, stutters, and flutters that play with the theme of bee life. "Fleur-de-Lis," last year's striking composition of religious imagery, shares the program. (227 Fourth Ave., Brooklyn. 718-857-4816. June 17, June 19, June 24, and June 26 at 7:30.)

ISRAEL GALVÁN
The flamenco virtuoso is both a traditionalist and a modernist. He can dance Kafka's "Metamorphosis" or incorporate moves that would have worked for John Travolta in "Saturday Night Fever" without compromising the attitude of a serious, searching *bailaor*. Dia Art Foundation presents him in a free outdoor concert at Audubon Terrace, against the Beaux-Arts buildings of the Hispanic Society of America. (Broadway at 155th St. 212-293-5583. June 17 at 7:30.)

DANCE BY NEIL GREENBERG
Greenberg presents "Really Queer Dance with Harps" and "Quartet with Three Gay Men," from 2006. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. June 18-21 at 7:30.)

FLY-BY-NIGHT DANCE THEATRE
Julie Ludwick's troupe specializes in aerial dance, which in this case means movement performed with the aid of a trapeze. Flight, or, more specifically, the grace and physical courage of the air-travel pioneer Amelia Earhart, is the subject of Ludwick's "The Amelia Project." Now in its second phase, the piece includes video projections and text; the performances will be accompanied by Ken Pierson's score for piano and percussion, performed live. (The Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101. June 19 and June 22 at 7 and June 20-21 at 7 and 9.)

"FOOD FOR THOUGHT"
Danspace Project's regular dance sampler casts its net statewide this time out, offering three programs that mix downtown artists with some from upstate. The locals include Daniel Linehan, Takemi Kitamura, and Leah Morrison; the out-of-towners, including Pooh Kaye, come from Worcester, Woodstock, and Ghent. Two cans of food get you a discounted ticket. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. June 19-21 at 8:30.)

CORNFIELD DANCE
Dances about the shrinking spaces for dance are becoming a trend. "Dance for a Small Room," by the veteran choreographer Ellen Cornfield, connects physical constriction with the emotional kind and struggles against both. The six musicians who play Koven J. Smith's score are incorporated into the dance, further crowding the room. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. June 20-21 at 7:30 and June 22 at 3.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW
The season begins with "Griot New York," Garth Fagan's landmark 1991 collaboration with Wynton Marsalis. Fagan's idiosyncratic blend of modern and Afro-Caribbean vocabularies works well with Marsalis's wide-ranging jazz score (played in recorded form here) and with the wonderful set pieces—giant farm implements—contributed by the sculptor Martin Puryear. In its poetic evocation of urban life, the dance turns pastoral, and the central duet achieves an intimacy that's at once emotionally naked and grandiose. (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. For a complete schedule, visit www.jacobspillow.org. June 18-21 at 8 and June 22 at 2 and 8. Through Aug. 24.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA: "LIVE IN PROSPECT PARK"
Peter Gelb can't be accused of retiring the Met's longtime series of free parks concerts, but he is certainly interested in getting more bang for the buck. There will be only one this year, but on a grand scale: the soprano Angela Gheorghiu and her husband, the tenor Roberto Alagna, will stand before the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus to offer arias and duets from operas by Verdi, Puccini, Donizetti, and Massenet, conducted by Ion Marin. Six jumbo screens will be installed throughout the park to maximize visibility for the audience, which the Met hopes will number in the tens of thousands. (Long Meadow, Prospect Park, Brooklyn. June 20 at 8. No tickets required. For more information, call 212-362-6000 or visit www.metopera.org/park.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
With Mahler's Ninth Symphony barely behind him, Lorin Maazel takes on another colossus of the late-Romantic German repertory: the Symphony No. 8 in C Minor by Bruckner, in the final two concerts of the orchestra's subscription season. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. June 20-21 at 8.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC: "CONCERTS IN THE PARKS"
The first phase of the Philharmonic's ambitious summer schedule (which will end with a European tour in August) commences with a free concert on the Great Lawn, conducted by Bramwell Tovey, who will also lead the orchestra's "Summertime Classics" series in Avery Fisher Hall next week. His initial program couldn't be friendlier: Mendelssohn's gracious "Italian" Symphony, along with festive works by Shostakovich, Sousa, and Tchaikovsky (the "1812 Overture"); fireworks close the concert. (Central Park. June 24 at 8. No tickets required. For more information, visit www.nyphil.org.)

RIVERSIDE SYMPHONY
George Tsontakis's Violin Concerto No. 2, a radiant and highly personal work tinged with Messiaen, Berg, and the music of the composer's Greek Orthodox background, won the prestigious Grawemeyer Award for 2005. George Rothman's fine orchestra, veterans of many a brave foray into the fields of new music, offers the New York première of the work (which features the young Russian-American violinist Yevgeny Kutik). The concerto will be bookended by performances of two charming pieces, Mozart's Divertimento in D Major, K. 136, and Gounod's Symphony No. 1 in D Major. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-864-4197. June 18 at 7:30.)

NAUMBURG ORCHESTRAL CONCERTS
The Brooklyn Philharmonic has the first slot in the annual series offered in Central Park's Naumburg Bandshell, but its musicians won't be taking the easy way out. Their meaty program features performances of Stravinsky's "Dumbarton Oaks" Concerto, Beethoven's Fourth Symphony, and Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 5 in A Major (with Tim Fain, the former first violinist of the Rossetti String Quartet, who is embarking on a solo career). George Garrett Keast conducts. (Concert Ground, Central Park, south of 72nd St. June 24 at 7:30. No tickets required. For more information, visit www.naumburgconcerts.org.)

RECITALS

SIMONE DINNERSTEIN AT (LE) POISSON ROUGE
For traditionalists, the collapse of the aesthetic hierarchy that put classical on top is a disaster; for

MARCELLUS HALL

the young, it's an opportunity. This new space—on the site of the late, lamented Village Gate—is devoted to creatively mixing music of all kinds. Its first classical event features the breakout pianist, whose program combines selections from the Goldberg Variations with George Crumb's "Eine Kleine Mitternachtmusik," a tribute to Thelonious Monk; the singer-songwriter Essie Jain opens for Dinnerstein. (158 Bleecker St. 212-796-0741. June 17 at 6:30.)

BARGEMUSIC
The pianist and lecturer Jeffrey Swann dominates the floating chamber-music series this week. June 18 and June 20 at 8: "Music and Nature," a solo recital featuring works by Schumann ("Waldszenen"), Liszt (including "Vallée d'Obermann"), Messiaen, and Debussy ("Brouillards," "Des Pas sur la Neige," and other short pieces). ♦ June 21 at 8 and June 22 at 4: The young Voxare Quartet joins Swann for a program featuring not only Schubert's "Quartettsatz" but intimate versions of piano concertos by Mozart (No. 12 in A Major) and Chopin (No. 1 in E Minor). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

"WORDLESS AT WHITNEY LIVE"
The Whitney Museum of American Art is taking Ronen Givony's Wordless Music series (which seems to gather buzz by the month) under its wing in June. In the third of four genre-smashing concerts, the American Contemporary Music Ensemble offers music, by Kevin Volans and Chen Yi, chosen to complement the "glitch-hop" style of Prefuse 73. (Madison Ave. at 75th St. June 20 at 7. Free with museum admission.)

"MAKE MUSIC NEW YORK"
It's back: the big daylong festival of free outdoor concerts, which débuted last year on the first day of summer. This year's edition—which promises more than eight hundred events—includes, in the classical department, concerts given by performers from the New York City Opera, the "Works & Process" series (a tribute to Louise Bourgeois, at the Guggenheim Museum), and the brass section of the New York Philharmonic, along with the ensembles Newspeak, SONYC, and Face the Music (performing Terry Riley's "In C"). (June 21. For a schedule of events and starting times, visit www.makemusicny.org.)

IVAN ILIC
The adventurous Paris-based pianist (who studied both music and mathematics at Berkeley) likes his music on the brainy side; his New York recital début features music by Princeton University's Dmitri Tymoczko and M.I.T.'s Keeril Makan ("Afterglow"), among other contemporaries, with eight of Debussy's Preludes (from Book II) as a chaser. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. June 23 at 8.)

JOHN KAMITSUKA
The pianist, an elegant but unsentimental conservative, gives his sixth annual recital at Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall—an evening of works by Bach (two preludes and fugues from Book I of the Well-Tempered Clavier), Mozart, Barber, and Beethoven (the "Waldstein" Sonata). (212-247-7800. June 24 at 8.)

OUT OF TOWN

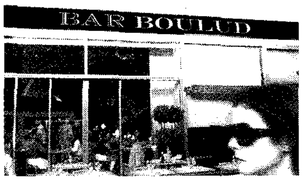
PERLMAN MUSIC PROGRAM
Education has become one of Itzhak Perlman's prime concerns in recent years, especially at this music campus near Sag Harbor, where string players from ages eleven to thirty can study under the great violinist and other masters. The summer begins with a faculty concert featuring such distinguished players as Ronald Leonard, the former principal cellist of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. (Shelter Island, N.Y. www.perlmanmusicprogram.org. June 20 at 7:30.)

TANNERY POND CONCERTS
The photographer Christian Steiner's almost-private festival, held in a former Shaker tannery, offers a small but choice selection of the world's finest musicians. This weekend it's the cello-and-piano team of David Finckel and his wife, Wu Han, who join the violinist Da-Hong Saetoo in piano trios by Beethoven (including the "Ghost" and the "Archduke"). (New Lebanon, N.Y. 888-820-9441. June 20 at 8.)

CARAMOOR FESTIVAL
This vital Westchester festival, comprising orchestral concerts, opera, chamber music, and jazz, begins another season under its general director, Michael Barrett. He leads the Orchestra of St. Luke's in a populist opening-night program that includes works by Bernstein (the Three Meditations from "Mass," with the cellist Alisa Weilerstein), Copland, Fauré, and Gershwin (the "Concerto in F," with the pianist Jon Kimura Parker). (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252. June 21 at 8:30.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
Devoted to the art of the string quartet, this festival's performances are held in a whitewashed box of a hall with reverberant acoustics. It next hosts the Penderecki String Quartet, performing quartets by Haydn (the "Emperor") and Janáček (No. 1, inspired by Tolstoy's short story "The Kreutzer Sonata") as well as the cello-quintet arrangement (with the cellist Mihai Tetel) of Beethoven's Violin Sonata in A Major, "Kreutzer." (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126. June 22 at 3.)

TABLES FOR TWO
BAR BOULUD



HONORE BROWN

1900 Broadway, between 63rd and 64th Sts. (212-595-0303)—An affectionate homage to the cuisine of Daniel Boulud's native Lyons, Bar Boulud presents the earthy glories of French *terroir* in a setting reminiscent of a SoHo store or—with its long bar and swooping, swanlike decanters—a laboratory. The Lyons influence is apparent in the wine list, which focusses on the two adjacent regions (Burgundy to the north, the Rhône Valley to the south), and in the spectacular range of charcuterie. Few New York chefs venture farther into the latter than the predictable foie-gras terrine, but Boulud took the task seriously enough to bring a *charcutier*, Sylvain Gasdon, over from Paris. (Gasdon is a protégé of Gilles Verot, who comes from a line of *charcutiers* near Lyons and now operates two high-end stores in Paris.) "Is pâté really that hard to make?" a skeptical diner asked recently, but the restaurant's diligence is repaid with a firm, rich head cheese, a *boudin blanc* (a sausage of pork and cream) that breaks apart in your mouth with feathery delicacy, and a torte of sweetbreads, foie gras, and morels sealed in pastry crust. Served in cross-section, it looks like edible marquetry.

Charcuterie aside, Boulud has made the canny decision to limit ambition for the sake of consistency. The menu takes in Lyonnaise *bouchon* specialties like coq au vin and chicken-liver salad and a roster of bistro favorites, like steak frites and *croque-monsieur*. More individual touches are rare but so, too, are missteps (though a pea soup lacked the necessary springlike sweetness and tasted mostly of its chicken-stock base). A simple dish of tarragon chicken was flavored and cooked with such remarkable evenness that the meat welcomed the knife almost like a fillet of fish.

As for the wine, the list teems with well-chosen, more or less affordable bottles, though prices extend well into four figures for anyone who's game. There are fewer choices by the glass, though, and anyone who is not a committed oenophile may start to find the restaurant's iconography of wine a little silly. One wall bears a series of framed wine stains, which looks as if Hermann Rorschach had taken to drink, and one end of the dining room is dominated by a ring-shaped table intended for wine tastings, though it currently serves as an ordinary, if awkward, communal table. A queasy sense that oenomania can be taken too far takes hold in the men's bathroom, where one notices grainy black-and-white photographs of the smudged, drained glasses from a lunch that Boulud held for Robert Parker in 2002, which are hung directly above the urinals. (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner and weekends for brunch and dinner. Entrées $23-$33.)

—*Leo Carey*

MOVIES
OPENING

BRICK LANE
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening June 20. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

EXPIRED
A drama, directed by Cecilia Miniucchi, about the romance between a meter maid (Samantha Morton) and a traffic cop (Jason Patric). Opening June 20. (Angelika Film Center and Village East Cinemas.)

GET SMART
Peter Segal directed this adaptation of the classic TV series, starring Steve Carell as Maxwell Smart; co-starring Anne Hathaway, Dwayne (the Rock) Johnson, Alan Arkin, and Terence Stamp. Opening June 20. (In wide release.)

KIT KITTREDGE: AN AMERICAN GIRL
A drama, based on the "American Girl" series of books and dolls, about a girl who grows up during the Depression. Directed by Patricia Rozema; starring Abigail Breslin, Joan Cusack, Chris O'Donnell, Julia Ormond, Stanley Tucci, and Wallace Shawn. Opening June 20. (In limited release.)

THE LOVE GURU
Marco Schnabel directed this comedy, co-written by and starring Mike Myers, about a guru who tries to help a hockey player with his romantic troubles. Opening June 20. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

BRICK LANE
A lovely movie. If only it were a little more exciting. Nazneen (Tannishtha Chatterjee), a beautiful Bangladeshi girl who, in the nineteen-eighties, gets sent to London to marry an established businessman, settles into Brick Lane, a traditional immigrant enclave. Her good-humored but pompous husband, Chanu (Satish Kaushik), is a classic post-colonial subject—he thinks that the British will accept him if he has read Brontë and Thackeray. Nazneen suffers under the weight of his illusions and his failure, never making her own wishes known, and then meets a handsome young man, Karim (Christopher Simpson), who grew up in London and has no illusions about anything. The first-time director Sarah Gavron, working with the cinematographer Robbie Ryan, has an appreciation of temperament and a tactile feeling for flesh that suggests extraordinary talent, but the movie is a shade cautious—it doesn't take off emotionally. Yet the tensions of an embattled immigrant community are fully realized. Gavron is a filmmaker to watch.—*David Denby* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
THE LITTLE DICTATOR

Charles Chaplin's coldly brilliant "Monsieur Verdoux" (1947), at Film Forum through June 19, is set in France during the Depression, but it could only have been made in the gray afterlight of the Second World War. Monsieur Verdoux (Chaplin) is a refined bourgeois who, in order to support his little boy and crippled wife, marries, and then murders, one wealthy widow after another. Verdoux is worldly, tactful, exquisitely gentle to the women he kills. It would be useless to pretend that one's enjoyment of the movie's outrageous and amoral irony isn't central to its appeal. One roots for Verdoux to be successful, though the scenes in which he is thwarted by Martha Raye's stupid, noisy force of life—an ex-tart who won the lottery—are the most satisfying in the movie. Chaplin makes speeches about the connections between capitalism and murder which some people have found profound but which Chaplin may have intended as an irony within an irony—as rhetoric exposing Verdoux as a sophist. In all, this is one of the most challenging movies ever made in Hollywood.

—*David Denby*

THE EDGE OF HEAVEN

A challenging new film from the director Fatih Akin, who revisits the ground that he covered so forcefully three years ago in "Head-On." The story splits its time between northern Germany, where a prostitute (Nursel Köse) enters the lives of a lecherous widower (Tuncel Kurtiz) and his sombre, studious son (Baki Davrak), and Istanbul, where the prostitute's daughter (Nurgül Yesilçay) is living a threatened existence. She is a political activist, but the fire in her seems to spread beyond politics; you feel it blazing into love when she flees Turkey for Hamburg and meets an equally hot-hearted young student (Patrycia Ziolkowska). Throughout the movie, people tack back and forth between the two countries, as if trying and failing to find safe haven; if any calm does emerge from such desperation, it comes from Hanna Schygulla, who returns to the screen with an extraordinary depiction of both bewilderment and strength. In her role as the student's mother, she helps Akin to suggest, once again, the enormous distances, geographical and spiritual, that people of every age and background can travel—surprising themselves in the act of transformation. In Turkish, German, and English.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 5/26/08.) (In wide release.)

ENCOUNTERS AT THE END OF THE WORLD

Werner Herzog's first-person documentary about his visit to Antarctica is not only a jaundiced spin on nature travelogues but an oddly revealing distillation of his career-long nexus of obsessions. Arriving at the McMurdo base, he discovers such banal appurtenances as a bowling alley and A.T.M.s, and what he calls "abominations such as an aerobics studio and yoga classes," and is seized with revulsion and a craving to get into the wilderness and experience the strangeness. His genre is the head trip, his worship of nature quasi-pagan, his chosen kin the adventurer élite, and his prejudice the dismissive lack of interest in everyone else. He is impressed by everything that is awe-inspiring, intimidating, overpowering, or incomprehensibly strange, and his crabby, self-righteous misanthropy, which comes through in every frame, rises to apocalyptic dimensions: learning of the perils to polar ice caps posed by global warming, he foresees with barely repressed glee the extinction of humanity through climate change. Only the comedy latent in his own sour ironies distinguishes this film—and indeed many of the films in his career—from the grimly romantic antihumanism of Weimar-era mountain-climbing dramas.—*Richard Brody* (Film Forum.)

HARAKIRI

Feudal Japan is at peace, and starving out-of-work samurai beg to perform ritual suicide at the mansions of powerful clans—a request they hope will lead to a charitable pittance or a menial job. When one of them is forced to go through with harakiri, his father-in-law, a veteran swordsman (Tatsuya Nakadai), vows to expose the cruelty and hypocrisy of the warrior code. The film has a steady, hypnotic momentum; the director, Masaki Kobayashi, wrings as much drama out of facial twitches as he does out of sword fights. He's helped, immensely, by Nakadai's molten performance and Toru Takemitsu's spare, disquieting music. In Japanese. Released in 1962.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; June 20-22.)

THE INCREDIBLE HULK

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

INDIANA JONES AND THE KINGDOM OF THE CRYSTAL SKULL

It isn't bad—there are a few dazzling sequences, and a couple of good performances—but the unprecedented blend of comedy and action that made the earlier Indiana Jones movies so much more fun than any other adventure series is mostly gone. Stretches of this picture are flat, fussy, and dull. (How many times can we enter those papier-mâché tombs?) Trying to regain the old rapture, you have to grasp at the few scenes that work—mainly in the beginning, when Steven Spielberg, setting the picture in 1957, captures the era's mixture of blandness, latent revolt, and apocalypse, showing the jukebox-and-pompadour youth culture alongside nuclear fears. The plot is incomprehensible gibberish about a crystal skull, the lost Amazonian city of Akator, and a brain-fried archeologist named Ox (John Hurt, who is anything but an ox). But there's a dandy, immensely complicated chase sequence in the jungle that links together physical improbabilities with the rhythm and speed of Buster Keaton (though on a much grander scale). Cate Blanchett is terrific as a slit-eyed, over-precise K.G.B. agent, but Harrison Ford, doing Indy again at sixty-five, doesn't appear happy. He's tense and glaring, and he speaks his lines with more emphasis than is necessary, like a drunk trying to prove he's sober.—*David Denby* (6/2/08) (In wide release.)

KUNG FU PANDA

The folks at DreamWorks get it right this time, with a vibrant, lively computer-generated adventure. Jack Black lends his voice to the lead character, Po, a panda bear with an outsized personality, who needs a great deal of training to fulfill his destiny as the savior of China's Valley of Peace. He's joined by a group of legendary fighters (Angelina Jolie, Seth Rogen, and Jackie Chan, among many others, provide voice work) to defeat an evil snow leopard (the great Ian McShane) who's out to destroy the valley. The animation work is dazzling; it's lovingly detailed without being overdone (particularly the opening sequence, which is hand-drawn and looks like prints struck from ancient woodblocks). The film has sweetness and wit; unlike some of DreamWorks's other animated movies, it's not overly reliant on pop-culture gags. Directed by John Stevenson and Mark Osborne.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

MY WINNIPEG

Guy Maddin's conjoined fantasy-memoir of his home town, structured as a meditation on why he can't bring himself to leave it, starts on a cinematic high from which it has trouble recovering: raw footage of a series of takes of the elderly actress Ann Savage (star of the classic film noir "Detour," from 1945), in which the relationship between director and actress converges with that of son and mother. Maddin has the comic inspiration to sublet his family home and bring in actors (including Savage) to reënact scenes of his childhood there, and these scenes have such intense psychodramatic power that Maddin deflects and apostrophizes them through the elaborate gamesmanship that characterizes most of the film. Musings on mystical and mythopoetic energy, odd and lurid byways of the city's history, and rueful odes to bygone sites and pleasures, all accomplished with a hysterical profusion of fantastic and confected images that fuse borrowings from silent camp classics and the experimental cinema, emerge insubstantial and overcooked. Nonetheless, Maddin's idea is so good, and his intentions so clearly realized, that the film proves endearing and its aftereffect haunting.—*R.B.* (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

OPERATION FILMMAKER

When Liev Schreiber saw an MTV spot featuring the Iraqi film student Muthana Mohmed, an aspiring director whose art school had recently been bombed by the U.S., he had an idea: he would bring Muthana to the set of the movie he was directing in the Czech Republic, "Everything Is Illuminated," to be an intern. In this friendly, fascinating documentary, the director Nina Davenport records the experience as it goes awry. Muthana's first sign of disillusionment—he has to hand-mix nuts for producers' snack cups—leads to a tug-of-war between his own blatant avoidance of various tasks (including a plum project: editing the blooper reel for the wrap party) and the producers' calling him on his laziness and dishonesty. After halfheartedly—and unsuccessfully—trying to convince Schreiber that if he returns to Iraq he will be killed because he was working with American Jews, he gets a job on "Doom," a zombie movie starring Dwayne (the Rock) Johnson. Davenport, who inserts herself into the film and ends up giving Muthana money several times, presents him as something of a thoughtless, unsuspecting refugee, who, given the chance, becomes the MTV-generation slacker he never knew he dreamed of being.—*Shauna Lyon* (IFC Center.)

SILJA GÖTZ

SEX AND THE CITY
Apart from the fact that it tells you nothing about sex and very little about the city in which it takes place, this adaptation of the successful TV series is titled with accuracy and pith. You could fit almost five episodes of the show into the movie, and the writer-director, Michael Patrick King, has a tough time filling the space. Minor events—the possibility, say, that a character might have to spend New Year's Eve alone—are pumped up into arias of pity and consolation. We are still stuck with the travails of four New York friends: Miranda (Cynthia Nixon), Charlotte (Kristin Davis), Samantha (Kim Cattrall), and Carrie (Sarah Jessica Parker), the sharpest and yet somehow the most self-deluded of them all. Her on-off wedding to Mr. Big (Chris Noth) forms a sizeable chunk of the plot, and interior designers everywhere will be thrilled to learn that the warmth of her emotions stands in direct proportion to the size of her walk-in closet. The film was always going to be predictable (that is part of its appeal), yet it feels too panicky to be stylish, and surprisingly tasteless: who could have foreseen that its humor would rely on a gastric gross-out? One small misstep of a movie; one giant leap backward for womankind.—*A.L.* (6/9 & 16/08) (In wide release.)

TAKE OUT
A remarkable film, purportedly made for three thousand dollars, by Sean Baker and Shih-Ching Tsou. Ming (Charles Jang), an illegal Chinese immigrant, tries to make enough money in one day working as a delivery boy to pay off the thugs who smuggled him to the States. Revolving around a hole-in-the-wall Chinese restaurant on the Upper West Side—where the front of the house is in the loving care of Big Sister (the utterly winning Wang-Thye Lee)—Baker and Tsou's simple narrative feels like a richly authentic documentary. The terrific cast is led by Jang (amazingly, a Long Island native), who plays Ming as a determined, reticent man who seethes deeply within his shell.—*S.L.* (Quad Cinema.)

WARSAW BRIDGE
Pere Portabella's erotico-literary fantasy, from 1990, is a mystery in the best sense: its puzzle-like construction, dream-based interludes, and cryptic asides go far beyond the plot to illuminate the strangeness of life itself. The elliptical story concerns a female professor of biology who shuttles between two men, a fatuous and successful novelist and an intellectual, whimsical orchestra conductor. The odd and unexplained death of the latter provides the pretext for lengthy flashbacks—or even just flashes, since a macabre, Lynchian trance state set in a German subway car belongs to no time frame at all. The elusive, dazzlingly imaginative episodes include a concert of musicians scattered high above a town square, following along with a conductor whom each sees on his own television set; a performance of Wagner set in a fish market, featuring the daily catch and a couple of forklifts; a disquisition on the biological differences between squid and cuttlefish, bellowed through library corridors in lieu of a seduction; and scenes of frank, voluptuous sensuality, accomplished with a rare wit and tenderness. The entire film is suffused with sumptuous, painterly care for light and texture, as if conjuring up the birth of the world, and quizzical tracking shots move at the wondrous pace of revelation. Joining humor and calamity, Portabella's film fulfills the classical role of tragedy: a restoration of faith in existence nonetheless. In Spanish and Catalan.—*R.B.* (MOMA; June 18-19.)

YOU DON'T MESS WITH THE ZOHAN
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

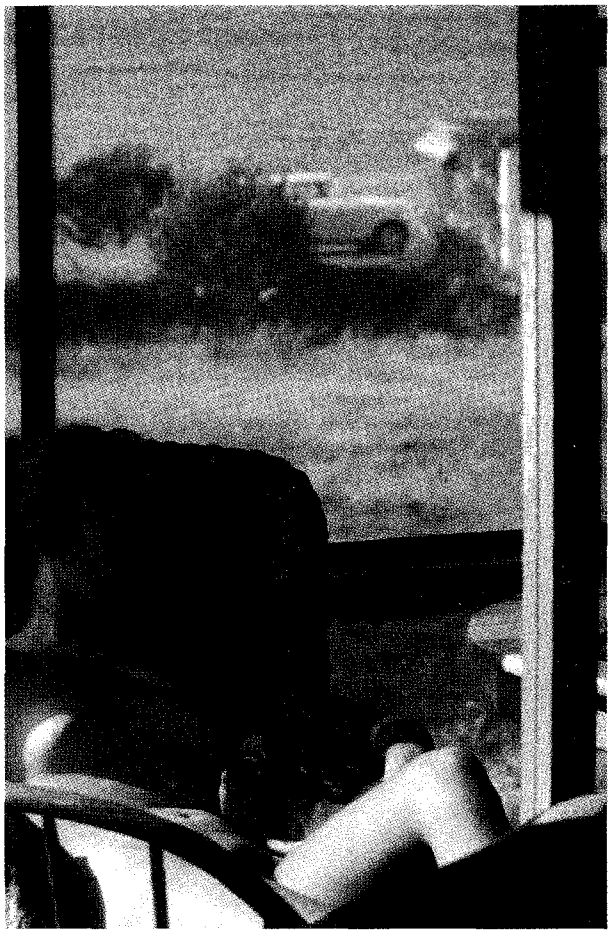
Also Playing

BEAUTY IN TROUBLE: Angelika Film Center. **THE HAPPENING:** In wide release. **LOVE COMES LATELY:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema. **QUID PRO QUO:** Sunshine Cinema.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"Personal Archive." June 19 at 8: Films from the collection of Michael Chaiken. ♦ The films of Danny Lyon. June 20 at 7 and June 23 at 9: Program 1, including "Los Niños Abandonados" (1975). ♦ June 20 at 9 and June 24 at 7: Program 2, including "Llanito" (1971). ♦ June 21 at 6:30 and June 24 at 9:30: Program 3, featuring "Willie" (1985). ♦ June 21 at 8:30 and June 25 at 7: Program 4, including "El Otro Lado" (1978). ♦ June 22 at 6:30 and June 25 at 9: Program 5, including "The Destiny of the Zerox Kid" (1969). ♦ June 22 at 8:30 and June 26 at 7: Program 6, including "Media Man" (1994). ♦ June 23 at 7 and June 26 at 9: Program 7, including "Five Days" (2004). ♦ "Cinema Dance Eros," short films by Amy Greenfield and Kenneth Anger, introduced by Greenfield. June 20-21 at 7: Program 1. ♦ June 20-21 at 9:30: Program 2. ♦ "Essential Cinema." June 21-22 at 4: "Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son" (1969).



Saul Leiter's photograph "Lanesville, 1958," at Greenberg.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Through July 3: "Directors' Fortnight at 40." June 18-19 at 4:30 and 8:10: "Céline and Julie Go Boating" (1974, Jacques Rivette; in French). ♦ June 20 at 2, 4:30, and 8:10: "Fox and His Friends" (1975, Rainer Werner Fassbinder; in German). ♦ June 21 at 2 and 7: "Radio On" (1980, Christopher Petit; in English and German). ♦ June 21 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Control" (2007, Anton Corbijn). ♦ June 22 at 2 and 6:50: "Adhen" (2008, Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche; in French). ♦ June 22 at 4:30 and 9:30: "Morvern Callar" (2002, Lynne Ramsay). ♦ June 24 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Death by Hanging" (1968, Nagisa Oshima; in Japanese).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. June 18-19 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Monsieur Verdoux" (1947, Charles Chaplin). ♦ The films of Tatsuya Nakadai. All films are in Japanese. June 20 at 1, 3:35, 6:10, and 9:40 and June 21-22 at 1, 3:35, 6:10, and 8:45: "Harakiri" (†). The 6:10 screening on June 20 will be followed by a Q. & A. with Nakadai. ♦ June 23 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30 and June 24 at 3 and 5:30: "The Face of Another" (1966, Hiroshi Teshigahara).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"40th Anniversary: La Quinzaine des Réalisateurs." Except where noted, all films are in French. June 20 at 7: "Adhen" (2008, Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche). ♦ June 21 at 12:30: "On Fire" (2006, Claire Simon). ♦ June 21 at 4: "La France" (2007, Serge Bozon). ♦ June 21 at 7: "Change of Address" (2006, Emmanuel Mouret). ♦ June 22 at 4: "Life on Earth" (1999, Abderrahmane Sissako; in French and Bambara) and "The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun" (1999, Djibril Diop Mambéty; in French and Wolof). ♦ June 22 at 7: "Naked Childhood" (1969, Maurice Pialat). ♦ Through July 22: "Homage to Yves Montand." June 24 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Delusions of Grandeur" (1971, Gérard Oury; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—The New York Asian Film Festival. For complete program information, visit www.subwaycinema.com. June 20 at 3:30: "The Bodyguard" (2004, Panna Rittikrai and Petchtai Wongkamlao; in Thai). ♦ June 20 at 8: "Then Summer Came" (2008, Ryo Iwamatsu; in Japanese). ♦ June 22 at 4:45 and June 25 at 6: "Assembly" (2007, Feng Xiaogang; in Mandarin). ♦ June 22 at 7:20: "Mad Detective" (2007, Johnnie To and Wai Ka-fai; in Cantonese). ♦ June 23 at 2: "Happiness" (2007, Hur Jin-Ho; in Korean).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St.(212-708-9480)—Special screenings. June 18 at 5 and June 19 at 8:15: "Warsaw Bridge" (†). ♦ June 18 at 7, June 19 at 6, June 20 at 8:30, June 21 at 5, June 22 at 4, and June 23 at 8: "Taking Off" (1971, Milos Forman). ♦ "Jazz Score." June 16 at 6 and June 18 at 6:45: "No Sun in Venice" (1957, Roger Vadim; in French). ♦ "Celebrating Summer." June 19 at 6:15 and June 21 at 2: "The Night of the Shooting Stars" (1982, Paolo and Vittorio Taviani; in Italian). ♦ June 19 at 8:30 and June 23 at 6: "A Summer at Grandpa's" (1984, Hou Hsiao-hsien; in Hakka, Mandarin, and Shanghainese). ♦ June 22 at 2: "Little Fugitive" (1953, Ray Ashley, Morris Engel, and Ruth Orkin). ♦ "Salvador Dali: Creator/Collaborator." June 20 at 6 and June 21 at 2: "Spellbound" (1945, Alfred Hitchcock). ♦ June 20 at 8:30 and June 22 at 2: "L'Age d'Or" (1930, Luis Buñuel; in French), "Un Chien Andalou" (1929, Buñuel; silent), and "Eating Sea Urchins" (1930, Buñuel; silent). ♦ June 21 at 4:30 and June 23 at 6: "Father of the Bride" (1950, Vincente Minnelli).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—"Cabaret Cinema." June 20 at 9:30: "Chappaqua" (1966, Conrad Rooks), introduced by the director's son Alexander Rooks.

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"2008 Human Rights Watch International Film Festival." June 17 at 6:30 and June 19 at 1:30: "The Great-

est Silence: Rape in the Congo" (2007, Lisa Jackson; in English, French, Swahili, Lingala, and Mashi). ♦ June 17 at 9 and June 19 at 6:30: "Under the Bombs" (2007, Phillipe Aractingi; in Arabic). ♦ June 19 at 9:15, June 20 at 1:30, and June 21 at 4: "Behave" (2006, Maria Ramos; in Portuguese). ♦ June 20 at 9, June 22 at 3:30, and June 24 at 1: "The Sari Soldiers" (2008, Julie Bridgham; in Nepali). ♦ June 21 at 6:30, June 22 at 8:30, and June 23 at 4: "Project Kashmir" (2008, Senain Kheshgi and Greeta V. Patel; in English, Urdu, Kashmiri, and Hindi). ♦ June 21 at 9:15, June 22 at 1, and June 24 at 3:30: "China's Stolen Children" (2007, Jezza Neumann). ♦ June 23 at 6:30: "Critical Condition" (2008, Roger Weisberg).

READINGS AND TALKS

NATIONAL ARTS CLUB
Eugene Drucker, a violinist for the Emerson String Quartet, reads from his début novel, "The Savior," about a violinist in a Nazi concentration camp. Drucker will also perform. (15 Gramercy Park S. No tickets necessary. June 19 at 7.)

FILM FORUM
The downtown revival house, which is highlighting the work of Tatsuya Nakadai (see Movies), welcomes the noted Japanese actor, who will discuss his work on June 20, following the 6:10 screening of his 1962 film, "Harakiri." On June 24 at 8:20, Nakadai returns to talk with the Japanese-film specialist Michael Jeck. (209 W. Houston St. 212-727-8110.)

TIMES SQUARE POETS
The Poetry Society of America and the Times Square Alliance recently sponsored a contest for poems about the crossroads of the world. On June 23 at 6:30, the winners read their work, accompanied by two of the contest's judges, Alice Quinn and Tracie Morris, and other poets including Bob Holman, Philip Schultz, and Kimiko Hahn. (Traffic island at Broadway and 44th St. For more information, call 212-254-9628.)

THE HALF KING
The journalist Maggie Jackson reads from her new book, "Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age," an assessment of contemporary life. (505 W. 23rd St. No tickets necessary. June 23 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

SUMMER SOLSTICE
The blisteringly hot weather of late may give the impression that summer (or the apocalypse, for that matter) started weeks ago. Though that's not the case, the season is, in fact, arriving early this year, on June 20, at 7:59 P.M. local time, and a number of events hail the change. That evening, the urban shaman Mama Donna celebrates in Battery Park, starting at 7:30. (The Korean War Memorial, south of Castle Clinton.) On the 21st, Paul Winter and his consort begin their annual performance at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine at 4:30 A.M. and play through the sunrise. (Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 866-811-4111.) Later that day, the theatrical collective My Barbarian and Mama Donna (whose real name is Donna Henes) lead the charge at the Socrates Sculpture Park, in Long Island City, starting at 5. (www.socratessculpturepark.org.)

"CIRCUS SUNDAYS"
The Waterfront Museum and Showboat Barge, a refurbished 1914 Lehigh Valley Railroad barge at the foot of Conover Street, in Red Hook, Brooklyn, presents jugglers, magicians, and other refugees from the big top. (Sundays in June at 1 and 4. For more information, visit www.waterfrontmuseum.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
As temperatures rise, New York's auction houses like to cool off. **Sotheby's** holds a single auction this week, a sale of books and manuscripts (June 19), which is its last of the 2007-08 season. The highlights include a first edition of Isaac Newton's "Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica," in which the seventeenth-century mathematician and physicist laid out his laws of motion and universal gravitation, and fourteen pages from Arthur Conan Doyle's working manuscript for "His Last Bow," the final chapter of the Sherlock Holmes saga. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ Diverse delights grace **Swann's** sale of maps, atlases, natural history, historical prints, and ephemera (June 19). Among the star lots are a handsome map of Iceland printed in Antwerp in 1585; a nineteenth-century ornithological treatise on the hummingbirds of Mexico (with colorful lithograph plates); and a set of hilarious caricatures of members of the Imperial Russian Ballet from the early twentieth century, drawn by the famous dancers and teachers—and brothers—Nikolai and Sergei Legat. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

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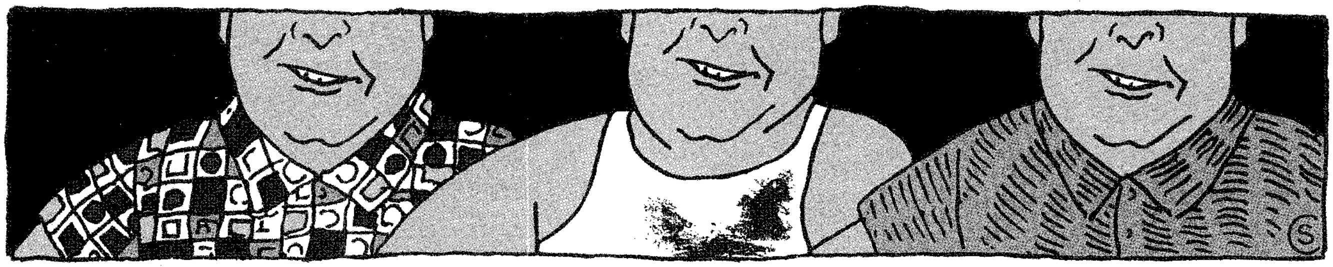
Visit the Goings On blog, at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson, for additional cultural coverage and commentary.



Clothing from "The Sopranos," at Christie's.

SEYMOUR CHWAST

ON THE HORIZON

ABOVE AND BEYOND
MAKE AN OFFER
June 25

James Gandolfini's wardrobe from "The Sopranos"—including a black velour Fila tracksuit—highlights Christie's pop-culture auction, along with other costumes from the series. (www.christies.com.)

THE THEATRE
WESTERN FRONT
June 25

Sam Shepard revisits one of his favorite themes, the Wild West, in "Kicking a Dead Horse," at the Public. Shepard wrote the play for the actor Stephen Rea, who stars as a successful New York art dealer who leaves behind his extravagant life style in search of a more authentic existence in the wilderness. (212-967-7555.)

ART
ROCK STARS
July 1-Sept. 21

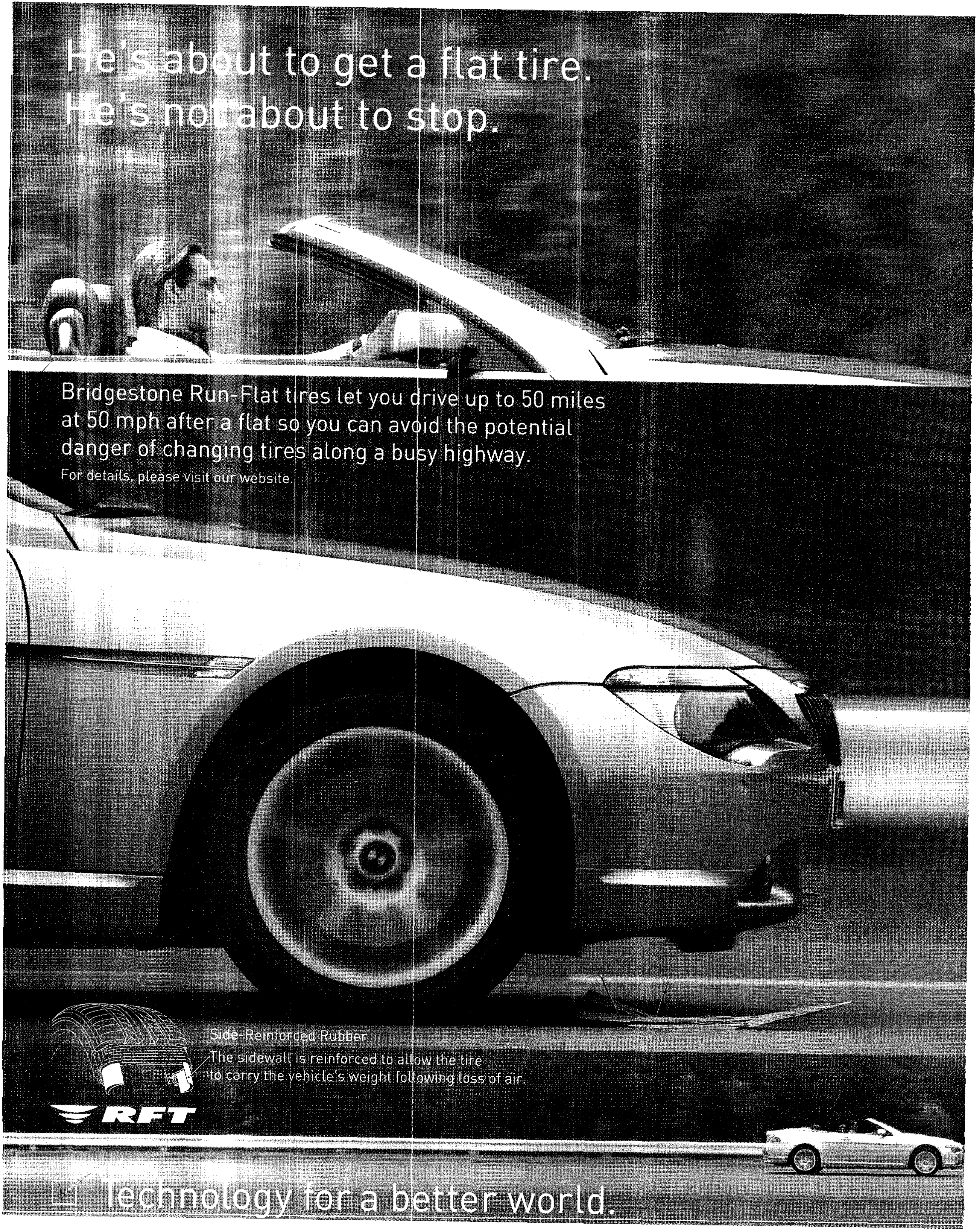
From the Renaissance to the early nineteenth century, European artisans incorporated semiprecious stones in elaborate decorative objects. More than a hundred and seventy colorful treasures—inlaid cabinets, tabletops, a tea service—will be on view at the Metropolitan Museum in "Art of the Royal Court: Treasures in Pietre Dure from the Palaces of Europe." (212-535-7710.)

MOVIES
CHEER AND SNEER
July 2-15

William Holden's brash-Everyman routine exuded self-confidence and consummate salesmanship, and his greatest roles show him heading for a painful comeuppance. He'd have been ninety this year, and Walter Reade honors him with two weeks of such familiar goodies as "Sunset Boulevard" and "Network," as well as rarities, including John Ford's "The Horse Soldiers" and Clint Eastwood's "Breezy." (212-875-5600.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
BARD YARD
July 19-Aug. 22

Shakespeare is all the rage at Glimmerglass Opera this summer, and the most eagerly awaited event is the first fully staged American production of "Das Liebesverbot," the young Richard Wagner's treatment of "Measure for Measure." (607-547-2255.)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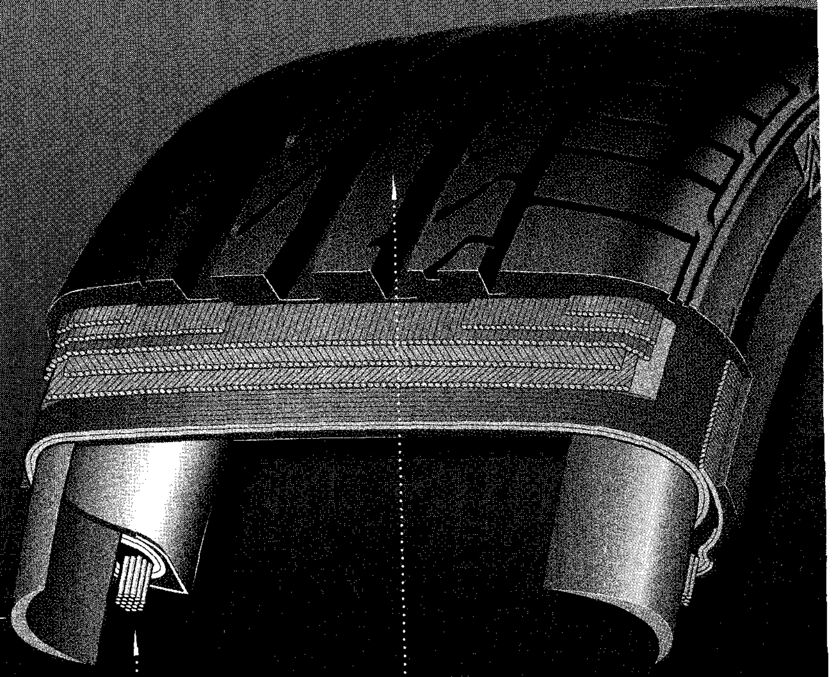

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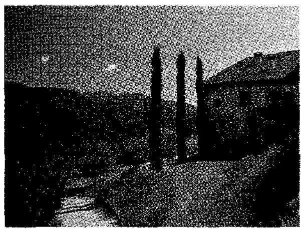

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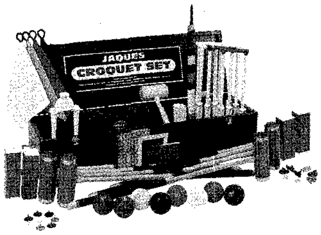
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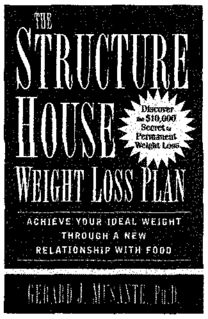
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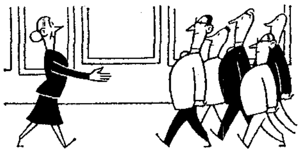
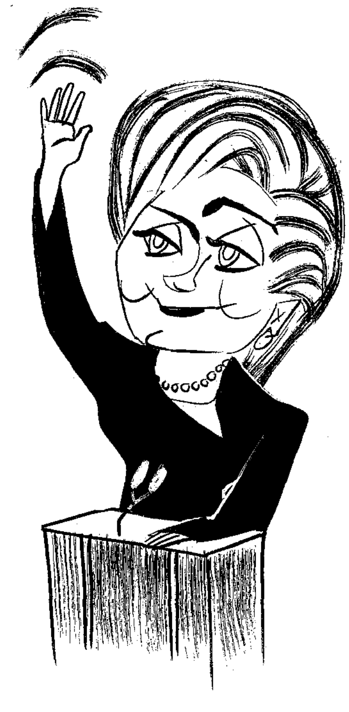
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
EXHILLARATION



The Presidential flight of Hillary Rodham Clinton, which had been aloft for nearly a year, began its descent stage on January 3, 2008, somewhere over Iowa. Five months later to the day, she piloted it to a smooth touchdown, though not without experiencing some turbulence during the final approach. First, there was her nonconcession speech, delivered on the final Tuesday of the primary season; then, after a few days of cogitation, consultation, and commiseration, there was her Saturday speech. Tuesday's speech was anything but full of grace, and, on the whole, was poorly received. Saturday's was greeted rapturously, often by the same commentators. "The way to continue our fight now, to accomplish the goals for which we stand," Clinton said, "is to take our energy, our passion, our strength, and do all we can to help elect Barack Obama the next President of the United States." And she said, echoing the signature chant of the Obama campaign, "Today, I am standing with Senator Obama to say: Yes, we can!" She could scarcely have been more emphatic.

With that, the most astounding primary season in American history came to an end. It was astounding not because of the policy differences separating the competing sides (these were trivial compared with their vast reaches of agreement), or because of the turmoil of the times and the bitterness of the clash (compared with the two campaigns of the Vietnam War era, 1968 and 1972, all was calm and collegial), but because of who the candidates were—more precisely, because of *what* they were. The first woman and the first man of color to have a serious chance of victory contended for the right to represent America's party of progressive change in the contest for the most powerful office on earth, and they fought each other very nearly to a draw. This conspicuous, astonishing fact was not much discussed by the candidates themselves; for them, the point was to transcend "identity politics," lest they be trapped in its stereotypes. Only when compelled by the antics of the retiring minister of his church did Obama directly confront the questions of race and identity, doing so in a speech of such power and nuance that it saved his campaign. Clinton—whose "identity," after all, comprises more than half the electorate and extends, by definition, into every family on earth—treated her gender as a grace note, a significant but ultimately secondary feature, like Jimmy Carter's Southernness or Bob Dole's war wound. Only in the final appearance of her exhausting campaign did Hillary Clinton speak at length about, in her words, "what it means to be a woman running for President."



Much of what she said was phrased in such a way as to apply to Obama as well as to herself. "I am a woman and, like millions of women, I know there are still barriers and biases out there, often unconscious, and I want to build an America that respects and embraces the potential of every last one of us," she declared. "There are no acceptable limits, and there are no acceptable prejudices in the twenty-first century in our country." And, speaking of herself, Obama, and the supporters of both: "We will make history together."

In the emotional climax of her speech, she said, "Although we weren't

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

able to shatter that highest, hardest glass ceiling this time, thanks to you it's got about eighteen million cracks in it—and the light is shining through like never before, filling us all with the hope and the sure knowledge that the path will be a little easier next time." Some people interpreted this to imply that it was her gender that denied her the prize. Only she knows whether she meant it that way, or whether that's what she believes. In such a close race, of course, almost any factor can be viewed as decisive. But it's hard to find anyone who will dispute that if she had not voted to authorize the Iraq war, or if her delegate-hunting strategy had been as astute as her principal opponent's, or if that opponent had been a slightly more ordinary politician, or, perhaps, if her campaign messages had been more coherent and less negative, then she would have breezed to the nomination and made history all by herself.

Competitions among grievances do not ennoble, and both Clinton and Obama strove to avoid one; but it does not belittle the oppressions of gender to suggest that in America the oppressions of race have cut deeper. Clinton's supporters would sometimes note that the Constitution did not extend the vote to women until a half century after it extended it to men of color. But there is no gender equivalent of the nightmare of disenfranchisement, lynching, apartheid, and peonage that followed Reconstruction, to say nothing of "the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil" that preceded it. Nor has any feminist leader shared the fate of Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X. Clinton spoke on Saturday of "women in their eighties and nineties, born before women could vote." But Barack Obama is only in his forties, and he was born before the Voting Rights Act redeemed the broken promise of the Fifteenth Amendment.

Clinton was right to say that from now on it will be "unremarkable to think that a woman can be the President of the United States"—and that, in large measure, is her doing. But the Speaker of the House is a woman; and there are, at the moment, sixteen women in the Senate and eight in the nation's governors' offices, the pools from which Presidential candidates are usually drawn. There are two African-American governors, only one of whom was elected to that office. There is one African-American senator—and seven months from now that one may have a different job.

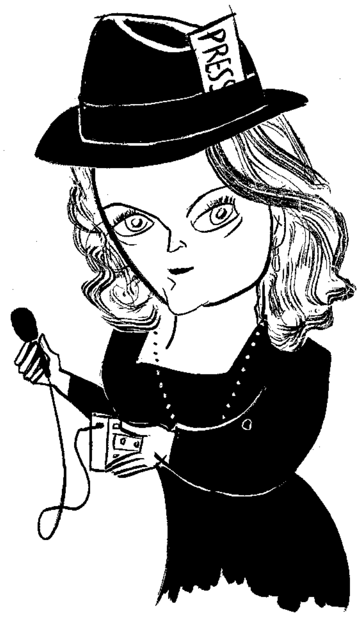
Clinton's defeat has left many of her supporters, especially among older women, not just disappointed but angry. Their anger is directed partly, sometimes mainly, at "the media," especially at a handful of commentators on the cable news networks, particularly MSNBC. (Fox News is hopeless; you might as well get angry at mildew.) One such commentator, in a fairly representative remark, described Clinton as "looking like everyone's first wife standing outside a probate court." Ugly, yes, and arguably misogynistic, but not much uglier (and probably less politically damaging) than the ridicule once heaped upon Michael Dukakis for looking wimpy in a tank and Al Gore for being stiff, or sighing, or wearing "earth tones" at the supposed urging of a feminist adviser—insults rooted, like the probate-court crack, in male stupidity. And the likelihood is that this sort of thing pushed more women into the Clinton column than men away from it.

Barack Obama—reared by a single mother, married to a strong-willed woman, father of two daughters—has an unblemished record of support for the goals of the mainstream women's movement. Yet, according to a Wall Street Journal/NBC poll taken over the weekend Clinton withdrew, in a hypothetical matchup with John McCain—whose record with respect to those goals ranges from indifference to hostility—she would win among white suburban women and Obama would lose. The anger of many such women is real, even if Obama is merely a momentary target of opportunity for it, even if it has little or nothing to do with anything he has done or said and everything to do with their own life experience. Fairly or unfairly, it's up to him to demonstrate anew that he respects their experience and understands their anger. And it's up to them to respond.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

SECOND ACTS
CITIZEN MAYHILL

Mayhill Fowler, at present the most famous "citizen journalist" on earth, recently spent a full week at home, in Oakland, after leaving Milbank, South Dakota, with her second major scoop of the campaign season: a three-minute audio clip of Bill Clinton coming unhinged on a rope line and referring to the *Vanity Fair* writer Todd Purdum as "slimy" and "a scumbag." It was Fowler's first extended rest since December, and, feeling a little like "poor Brit," as in Spears, on account of all the sudden attention, she employed her seven-year-old niece, Nadia, as a kind of receptionist to deflect phone inquiries for a while. (Fowler's husband, James, who is a real-estate lawyer, made the mistake of Googling her some weeks back, and had what he called a "dark night of the soul.") Then, as a reward, she took Nadia to an amusement park, and when they returned Fowler found three messages on her answering machine from what she calls "my fellow-Americans."



Mayhill Fowler

These Americans, unlike the many Obama supporters who bombarded her with hate mail back in April, after her first scoop (Obama at an ostensibly private fund-raiser: "They get bitter, they cling to guns or religion"), seemed benign. They had "concerns" that they were hoping Fowler, an Obama supporter herself, might be able to pass on to the Senator. "I thought, Whoa, they don't really understand the relationship of the press to candidates," Fowler said, expressing a sentiment that some of the candidates' staffers may feel about the proliferation of uncredentialled citizens armed with digital recorders.

Fowler, who is sixty-one, with frosted gray hair and gold jewelry, spent the previous three decades as an aspiring writer and the stay-at-home mother of two daughters. She publishes her campaign dispatches on the Huffington Post, as part of a series called "Off the Bus," and was envious of the plastic badges worn by certain members of the travelling press at Obama events, featuring a cartoon of Obama being boiled in a cauldron, while the Clintons tended the fire. "People like me, we just got paper badges," she said, and added that she had begun passing them out to young girls and encouraging the girls to write reports of their own for their "soccer newsletters."

Fowler comes from Tennessee—"My mother's from a Southern-gothic family with a rich political history," she said—although many of her relatives have since moved to Houston, "or Hoo-town, as I fondly call it." Her maternal grandfather, Watkins Overton, was the mayor of Memphis, and her great-grand-uncle C. P. J. Mooney, she once wrote, was a "muckraking newspaper editor who broke the power of the Klan in the state." In her self-appointed role as family historian, Fowler began compiling information for a series of monographs, and found that nineteenth-century newspaper stories often left her wanting. "A lot of basic things were not included, like the 'who-what-where,'" she said. "It was really frustrating." Thus inspired, she abandoned an earlier blog about the Middle East that was equal parts folksy ("Camels have a bad reputation that is undeserved") and serious ("Much to say about Fatah and Hamas"), and hit the Presidential trail, paying her own way. "The candidates, they zip to and fro like dragonflies," she said, and added, "I think I'm the first to have called the fact that the Iraq war was not going to be the locus of the debate."

The end of Hillary Clinton's campaign offered Fowler a moment of reflection, and she now found herself regretting that she had not written anything about the phenomenon of "the long, long-suffering husband who accompanied his Clinton-enthusiast wife" to rallies. " 'I'm happy she's happy about something,' " Fowler said, mimicking such men. Taking the advice of her own husband, she has decided to focus next on the travels of John McCain—assuming that she can figure out where he'll be. ("The McCain campaign is a little e-mail-challenged," she said.) She told her editor, however, that she is hoping for "no more scoops." Fowler's elder daughter shares her first name, and in the wake of "the fateful fund-raiser," as she now calls it, the junior Mayhill, who is thirty-four, absorbed much of the invective from Obama partisans. "She just left for Ukraine, and she said she's happy to be 'east of the Elbe,' " Fowler said.

—*Ben McGrath*

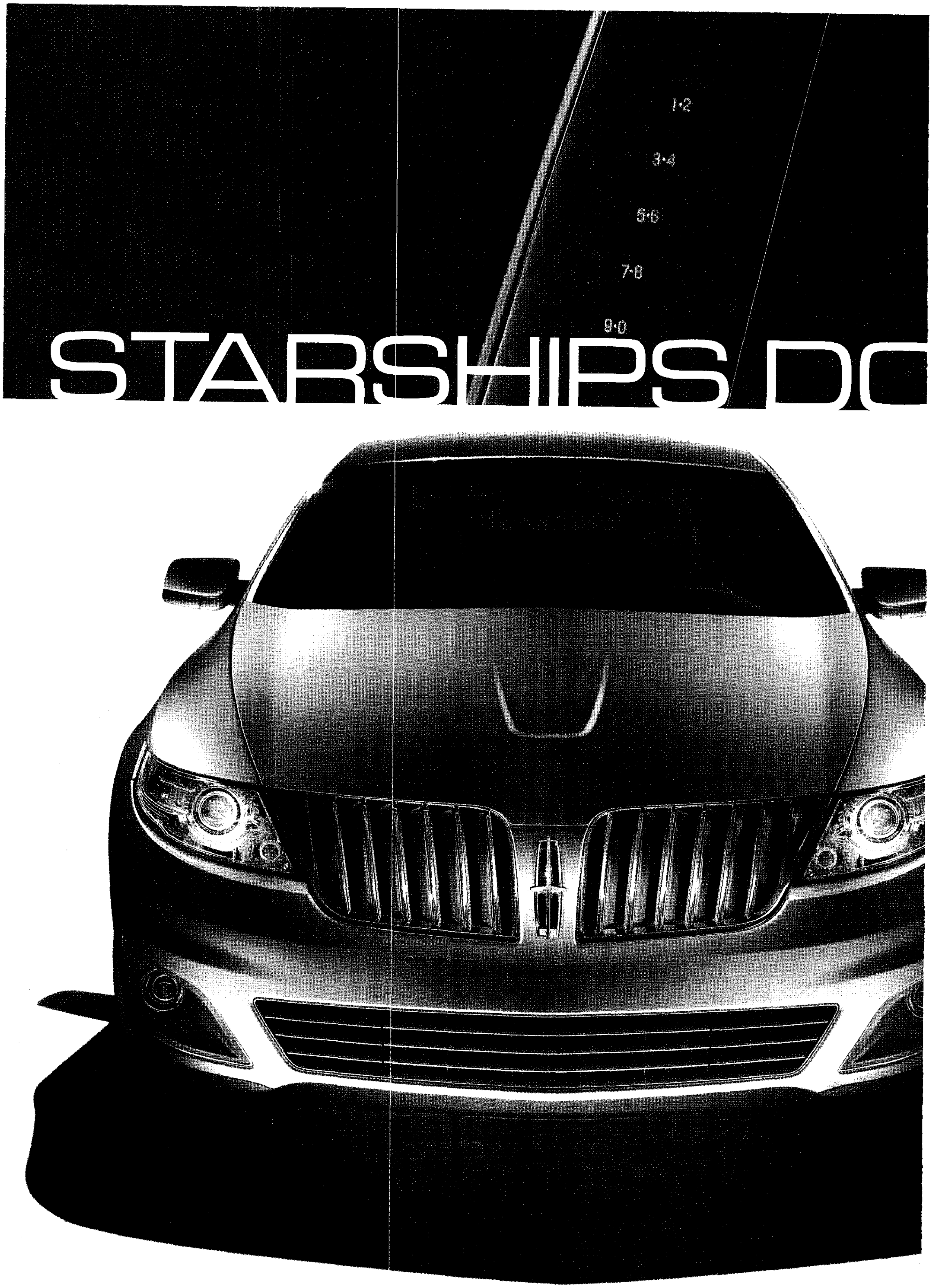
ON THE PODIUM
THE WAY THEY MOVE

There's been plenty of (metaphorical) eye-rolling, and head-shaking, over the pronouncements of "body-language experts" who have turned up on TV this election season to parse the candidates' fist bumps and grimaces. Finger-pointing, according to Tonya Reiman, on Fox, represents a "tough guy"; Janine Driver, on ABC, said, of John McCain's leaning against a lectern, "It's as if he's saying, 'I need a little more support here.' " It's comforting, in this atmosphere, to encounter the quasi-scientific talk of Laban movement analysts—a group of dance teachers, therapists, and others schooled in the techniques of Rudolf Laban, the early-twentieth-century artist turned industrialist. Laban came up with a way of describing people's movements based on two categories—Space Harmony and Effort—which can be broken down into subcategories, like Weight, Space, Time, and Flow, and special terms: Float, Punch, Glide, Slash, Dab, Wring, Flick, and Press. (There is a lot of capitalization in this system.) It takes five hundred hours of training to become a Certified Movement Analyst, or C.M.A. "It makes us sound like a cult," Janet Kaylo, a practitioner, said recently.

A few months ago, an argument about Hillary Clinton broke out on a Laban e-mail list. It was around the time of the Maryland primaries, and most people on the list had been discussing how the "coccyx-heel connection" affects skiing. Three C.M.A.s sent out a gloss of Obama's movement at a campaign event, praising his exceptional Flow, an indicator of empathy: "At one point, a woman handed him a baby. . . . He held the baby out at face level. The baby and Senator Obama looked each other in the eyes for a good three seconds, as if they were communing on some deeper level." Clinton supporters on the e-mail list took offense. "A little 'gushy,' " one wrote.

The Laban movement analysts concurred on a few things about Hillary Clinton: she makes strong Forming or Shaping motions—which, according to Kaylo, are "when your body molds a space as if it's wrapping itself around an object"—and she shows Assertion. (Think of Clinton at her concession speech, holding her arms in the air like goalposts.) But they disagreed about what kind of impression this gives. "I experience it as being controlling," Kaylo explained later, "but other movement analysts thought it was comforting. They think, Hey, she knows what she's doing." In one e-mail, a pro-Clinton C.M.A., Ellen Goldman, pointed out Clinton's appealing use of the vertical plane (holding her head straight during the debates) and of "descending movements," such as her signature slicing motion, which could suggest "a clarity and sense of priority of issues." Although she's not fluid, like Obama, Goldman noted that Clinton, jellyfishlike, "can grow and shrink in response to the life around her." (Hillary swaying to dance music in Puerto Rico?)

Clinton changed, the analysts agreed, during the course of the primaries. She dropped the "not very smart" habit of nodding vigorously after making a point, Kaylo said, and she toned down some facial expressions, including "the very exaggerated 'Oh, hi! Great to *see* you!'" Karen Bradley, a dance scholar,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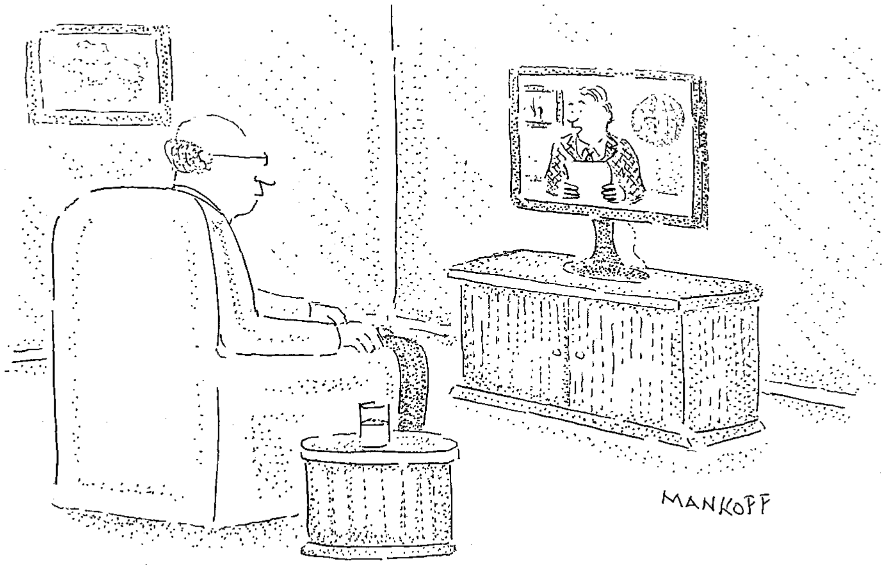


"A sad incident at LaGuardia Airport today as a depressed 757 landed and burst into tears."

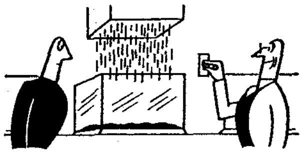
• •

said recently, "She was clearly getting some kind of training." Could the candidate have come under Labanian influence?

Michael Sheehan, the communications trainer who prepared Bill Clinton for many of his big Presidential speeches, and who coached Hillary during her 2000 Senate race (he also worked with one of her aides during the primaries), said he uses a professional-athlete approach with Hillary: he asks her to watch an edited videotape of herself and to identify what works and what doesn't. He never introduced Laban movement analysis, he said. But Hillary may be familiar with its precepts anyway. A few years ago, Miriam Phillips, a C.M.A. teaching a one-day Laban workshop for a dance class at Stanford, noticed a particularly attentive pupil. "She was one of those students that just stood out because she was so engaged in every way," Phillips recalled. "She was in the front row, raising her hand and answering a lot of questions. She seemed to have an affinity and love for movement, but also an understanding of the communicative value of dance. She was a beautiful mover. She was what we call very Embodied." Phillips asked another teacher for the student's name. It was Chelsea Clinton.

—Lizzie Widdicombe

ART DEPT.
WATER, WATER



Olafur Eliasson, the Danish-Icelandic installation artist, whose work has been on view this spring at both the Museum of Modern Art and its Queens affiliate, P.S. 1, is about to take over a large stretch of the East River. "The New York City Waterfalls," his latest project, opens on June 26th. It features four tall, widely separated, openwork steel towers housing powerful pumps that will pull river water up to a high basin and send it cascading down again, continuously, from seven in the morning until ten at night, through mid-October. Eliasson wants New Yorkers to sharpen their sense of the city as a waterfront place. "I am not trying to bring nature to the city," he explained last month. "It's a kind of counter-numbness project."

Standing beside the tower situated at Pier 35, just north of the Manhattan Bridge, Eliasson seemed more New York than Scandinavia: black mackintosh, rimless glasses, three-day stubble, darkish hair worn long in the back and at cross purposes on top. "This tower is a hundred and ten feet high," he said. "That one over there"—pointing across the river, under the Brooklyn Bridge—"is ninety feet. Can you see the one on Governor's Island, to the left of that white building? The fourth one is in Brooklyn Heights, near the promenade." Eliasson and the sponsors of the $15.5-million project, the Public Art Fund and the City of New York, have made a deal with the Circle Line to run boat tours for viewing the falls; the boats will leave from Pier 16, at frequent intervals, all summer. "The city is so big that it's hard to tell the scale of that space," he said, indicating a wide sweep of river. "It seems very big, but also very small, because we just pop over it all the time. When we see a waterfall, though, we can get a sense of the distance, because, the farther away it is, the slower it seems to fall."

As a child who spent summers with his father in Iceland—his parents were divorced when he was three—Eliasson took waterfalls for granted. "When you walk in Iceland, you have the highlands on one side and the ocean on the other side," he said. "So you are always running into waterfalls." He remembered this when he was an art student in Copenhagen, and getting involved with the dynamics of water, wind, light, and other natural phenomena. "I was interested in how we engage the world. How do we use our skin as our eyes?" He went on, "If you read a cityscape or a landscape with just your mind, and not your body, it becomes like a picture or representation, not something you really engage with. I think the potential of this particular space lies in getting your body into it."

He walked south along a riverside promenade. The noise was tremendous—cars on the F.D.R. Drive, overhead, subway trains on the Manhattan Bridge, horns and sirens. "You can tell from the light here that you are close to the ocean," he observed. "New York and Rome are at nearly the same latitude, but Rome's light is much more yellow, more warm and voluptuous. Here it is a cooler light, and very often there is this kind of ocean haze."

When Eliasson started to think about "The Waterfalls," nearly two years ago, he was introduced to Mayor Bloomberg, who surprised him by becoming intensely involved with the project. They had seven meetings, the most recent of which took place while Eliasson was installing his show at MOMA. They talked for an hour, "not about what art is but about what art does," Eliasson recalled. "It seemed very Renaissance to sit with the Mayor like that, talking about those things. I kept telling him, 'Don't quantify—it's not about numbers, about how many gallons of water are being used.' I really came to respect him a lot."

Near the Manhattan Bridge, Eliasson paused to admire an elderly Chinese man sitting on a bench and—as it appeared—washing his face very slowly, with both hands, in morning sunlight. A few days earlier, he said, he had seen a man painting with a big brush on the pavement, writing Chinese calligraphy, but with water, which disappeared as he wrote.

How did Eliasson decide that he needed four waterfalls for his project? "Well," he said, heading back uptown, "one would be a monument, two would be in opposition, three would be a triptych, and four is just—many. Four will make the journey around the bay somewhat comprehensible. I am quite nervous now, about 'The Waterfalls.' It is strange to do something this big that you cannot test beforehand." (Tests are going on all the time, but the four falls will not all be in operation at once until opening day.) Eliasson hopes that each viewer will experience the project differently. But, for the moment, he said, smiling equably, "you just don't know what it will look like."

—*Calvin Tomkins*

POSTSCRIPT
TIM RUSSERT

Our colleague Calvin Trillin once referred to the televised weekend bloviators from Washington as the "Sabbath Gasbags." Which was fair up to a point. Countless cubic feet of hot, polluted air are regularly unleashed into the national atmosphere by politicians and commentators on the networks and the cable stations, making life almost too easy for our most acute press critic, Jon Stewart. There would be no "Daily Show" without Fox News, CNN, MSNBC, and the (not quite so big anymore) Big Three. And yet Tim Russert, who died last Friday at the age of fifty-eight, was a gifted and cunning Sunday-morning interrogator who, while never quite disturbing his genuine persona or television's conventions, used his outsized position on "Meet the Press" to rattle many more politicians than any of his on-air rivals did.

"Meet the Press," which began as a radio show in 1945 and débuted on NBC two years later, is the longest-running program on television, and Russert, who began hosting in 1991, was its longest-running presider. Print reporters often look down on their colleagues in television as overpaid, underprepared, and soft on power, but the print reporters who assembled on "Meet the Press" in the days of Lawrence E. Spivak, the program's originator, were rarely as probing as Russert was at his best. With the help of his staff, Russert was especially good at arming himself for an interview by compiling a politician's previous statements in all their contradictions. Google was his tool and Gotcha his game. But it was Gotcha at its highest form. Russert's gift was to employ his bluff, nice-guy, good-son Irish Catholic upstate persona ("Go Bills!") to offset the avidity with which he would trip up his interlocutors. Arianna Huffington, who once called Russert a "conventional wisdom zombie," was among the many critics who pressed him to go much further, but Russert, more than anyone with a remotely equivalent job, did not back off easily, whether it was with Dick Cheney, in 2002, peddling nonsense about Iraq or with Al Gore, in 2000, trying to ease his way out of a line of questioning on abortion:

> RUSSERT: When do you think life begins?
> GORE: I favor the Roe vs. Wade approach, but let me just say, Tim, I did—
> RUSSERT: Which is what? When does life begin?
> GORE: Let me just say, I did change my position on the issue of federal funding and I changed it because I came to understand more from women—women think about this differently than men.
> RUSSERT: But you were calling fetuses innocent human life, and now you don't believe life begins at conception. I'm just trying to find out, when do you believe life begins?
> GORE: Well, look, the Roe vs. Wade decision proposes an answer to that question—
> RUSSERT: Which is?

Russert was no radical. He wanted the zing of confrontation but was always careful to withdraw at a certain point, the better not to cross the line between tough and hostile in the viewer's eyes. There were limits to his approach, and blogs both liberal and conservative sometimes purveyed the notion that he was nothing more than a cozy role-player in the Beltway drama. That notion was deeply unfair. His preparation insured that a politician could not drift long in a mental comfort zone. After one particularly contentious Sunday session, John McCain recalled that he told Russert, "I hadn't had so much fun since my last interrogation in prison camp." That expression of grudging admiration may well have been McCain's clever means of D.C. ingratiation, but one can guess it's not one he would have thought to extend to most of Russert's network and cable colleagues.

Russert was a central figure in the Washington media establishment—an interview with him long ago became a ritual of American political campaigns—but he ascended to that lordly position from modest beginnings. In Buffalo, where he grew up, the Sisters of Mercy were his teachers. He graduated from John Carroll University and the Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, at Cleveland State University. His avenue to journalism was through retail politics in New York: after law school, in 1976, he joined Daniel Patrick Moynihan's Senate campaign and became his chief of staff in Washington.

Russert did not come to television without an insider's sense of politics as it is played on the ground. During Moynihan's 1982 reëlection campaign, it was Russert who pointed out to reporters inconsistencies in the record of a Republican opponent, Bruce Caputo: Caputo had claimed to be a draftee and an Army lieutenant when, in fact, he had taken a civilian job in the Defense Department as a way to avoid the draft. Caputo's campaign ran to ground, and the phrase "to be Russerted" entered the lexicon of New York politics. "Get me a Russert," Gary Hart later demanded of his staff. Lawrence Grossman, the president of NBC News, was so taken by Russert's grasp of practical politics that he hired him as his assistant; eventually, Russert was appointed chief of the Washington bureau.

Russert was defined as much by what he was not as by what he was. He was not lazy or lax, he was not an ideologue or a cynic. Beyond his family, Russert's passion was politics, and he cared enough about the game to try to keep it, and its players, honest.

—*David Remnick*

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THE POLITICAL SCENE

ONE ANGRY MAN

Is Keith Olbermann changing TV news?

BY PETER J. BOYER

It was nearly midnight before Keith Olbermann left the NBC News election studio on May 13th, having spent five hours on the air, co-anchoring coverage of the West Virginia Democratic primary. Olbermann had a short ride home from Rockefeller Plaza to his condominium on the Upper East Side, and he was in bed by 2 A.M. But he lay wide awake, overcome by an urge to get up and move about. He has been given a diagnosis of Wittmaack-Ekbom's syndrome, also known as "restless-legs syndrome" (and also "the kicks," "Jimmy legs," and "jitters"), a neurological disorder that produces a prickling, itching, or crawling feeling in the legs, profoundly disturbing sleep. Reclining exacerbates the condition, so Olbermann got out of bed, took a pill for the ailment, and, while waiting for the drug to kick in, scrolled through his BlackBerry, scanning recent messages. One arrested his attention. It was a link to the Web site Politico, which featured an interview conducted that day with President Bush. Olbermann was struck by two questions from the interview, and by Bush's answers to them:

> Q: Mr. President, turning to the biggest issue of all, Iraq. Various people and various candidates talk about pulling out next year. If we were to pull out of Iraq next year, what's the worst that could happen, what's the doomsday scenario?
>
> Bush: Doomsday scenario of course is that extremists throughout the Middle East would be emboldened, which would eventually lead to another attack on the United States. The biggest issue we face is—it's bigger than Iraq—it's this ideological struggle against cold-blooded killers who will kill people to achieve their political objectives. Iraq just happens to be a part of this global war. . . .
>
> Q: Mr. President, you haven't been golfing in recent years. Is that related to Iraq?
>
> Bush: Yes, it really is. I don't want some mom whose son may have recently died to see the Commander-in-Chief playing golf. I feel I owe it to the families to be as—to be in solidarity as best as I can with them. And I think playing golf during a war just sends the wrong signal.

Olbermann suddenly had another sensation, unrelated to neurology—a feeling, he later recalled, that was "like being hit by lightning." He sat down at his computer and began to write. After an hour, he had the first draft of a lacerating indictment of Bush, a twelve-minute-long (eighteen pages in teleprompter script) *j'accuse*, addressed personally to the President.

"Mr. Bush, at long last, has it not dawned on you that the America you have now created includes 'cold-blooded killers who will kill people to achieve their political objectives'?" Olbermann wrote. "They are those in—or formerly in—your employ, who may yet be charged some day with war crimes."

The denunciation hit the high notes of the most fevered antiwar rhetoric, accusing Bush (he of the "addled brain"), his alleged puppet master ("the American snake-oil salesman Dick Cheney"), and the "tragically know-it-all minions," "sycophants," and "mental dwarves" who serve them in the Administration of perpetrating a "panoramic and murderous deceit" on America and the world. Intelligence was faked, W.M.D.s were imagined, Iraq was laid waste, and American freedoms were trashed.

Olbermann turned to Bush's golf remark, which he called the "final blow to our nation's solar plexus." He wrote:

> Mr. Bush, I hate to break it to you six and a half years after you yoked this nation and your place in history to the wrong war, in the wrong place, against the wrong people, but the war in Iraq is not about you. . . . It is not, Mr. Bush, about your golf game! And, sir, if you have any hopes that next January 20th will not be celebrated as a day of soul-wrenching, heartfelt thanksgiving, because your faithless stewardship of this presidency will have finally come to a merciful end, this last piece of advice . . . when somebody asks you, sir, about your gallant, noble, self-abnegating sacrifice of your golf game so as to soothe the families of the war dead. This advice, Mr. Bush: Shut the hell up!

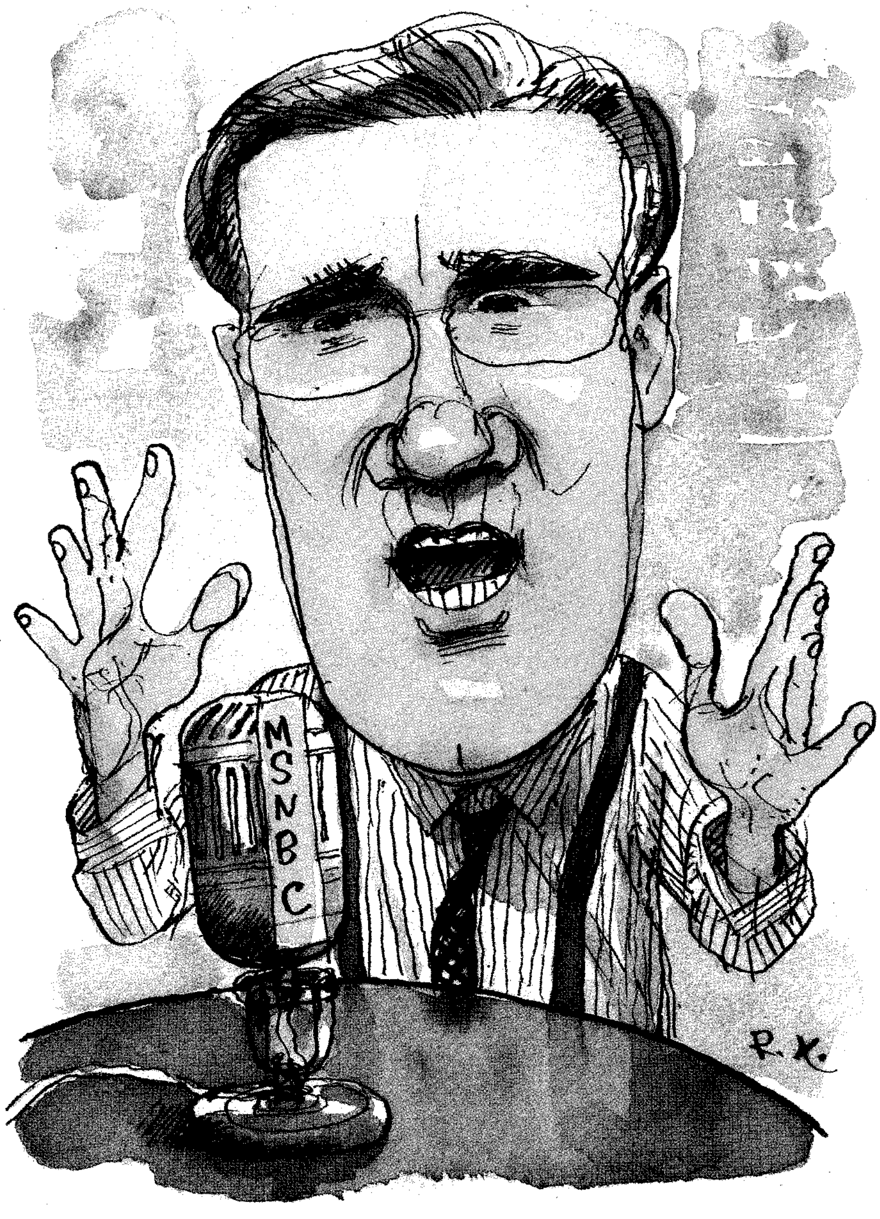
Olbermann finished the script shortly after 3 A.M. He e-mailed copies to his producers, and then he went to bed.

The jeremiad against Bush was a signature Olbermann effort, the sort of stylized, mocking tirade that has lately made him a cable-news sensation, the Edward R. Murrow of the Angry Left. Olbermann was pleased with the script, and the next day, before going on the air with it, he posted excerpts on the liberal blog Daily Kos, which is a fairly good representation of the Olbermann fan base. The Kossacks wholly approved. (“You excoriated the bloodyhanded, warmongering imbecile.” “This country cannot survive without you.” “Dude, you've got a pair of steel ones!” “I'm gonna print it out, hang it up and memorize it.”)

At MSNBC, the feedback was slightly more cautious. Olbermann's original script identified the “cold-blooded killers” as everyone at the Pentagon and in the Bush Cabinet; when a colleague noted that that would include such relative moderates as Colin Powell and Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Olbermann modified the line. Phil Griffin, the senior vice-president in charge of MSNBC (“Phil thinks he's my boss,” Olbermann says), raised the matter of tone. Why did Olbermann need to end his commentary by telling the President of the United States to “shut the hell up”?

“Because I can't say, ‘Shut the fuck up,’ that's why, frankly,” Olbermann responded. The line stayed in.

Phil Griffin is a compact, nearly bald man with the intensity and the revved-up metabolism of a TV-news field producer, which is how he spent his early career. He speaks in quick bursts, and his conversations tend to the elliptical. Griffin was Olbermann's first television producer, nearly thirty years ago, when both of them were at the start of their careers, Griffin as a CNN producer, Olbermann as an innovative, eccentric radio sportscaster making his first foray into television. It was Griffin's job to handle Olbermann, to teach him about the frenetic, video-hungry new world of cable news. In a way, he still sees himself as Olbermann's handler. “You don't take Keith on by just saying, ‘You can't do that,’ ” Griffin told me. “Keith is reasonable. But you've got to be smart. Keith is usually two steps ahead of me, when I do come and say, ‘Keith . . .’ It's a give-and-take.”



Olbermann reveres Murrow, but Murrow never called a President “Idiot-in-Chief.”

When, in 1981, Olbermann arrived at CNN, then still in its startup throes, he was, at twenty-two, seen as a sportscasting wunderkind—smart, offbeat, and possessed of an encyclopedic range of knowledge. He also had the reputation, even among those who admired his talents, of being somewhat difficult. Growing up in suburban Hastings-on-Hudson, in Westchester County, he was the sort of kid who, when his parents thought psychological testing was in order, responded to the Rorschach test by saying, “It looks like an inkblot.” Advised that Keith might be better served by a private education, his parents—Theodore, a commercial architect, and Marie, a preschool teacher—enrolled him at the Hackley School, in Tarrytown. It wasn't an easy adjustment; Keith had skipped a grade and was younger than anyone else in his class, and he wasn't a jock. But he was a good student, and the school's radio station became his home. Olbermann worked as a sports stringer in college, at Cornell, and when he graduated, in 1979, he went directly to a sportscasting job at UPI radio in New York.

Olbermann's style stood out from the start. He gently mocked the conventions of sportscasting (in his deep broadcaster's timbre) even while observing them. At UPI, he became famous for

RICHARD THOMPSON

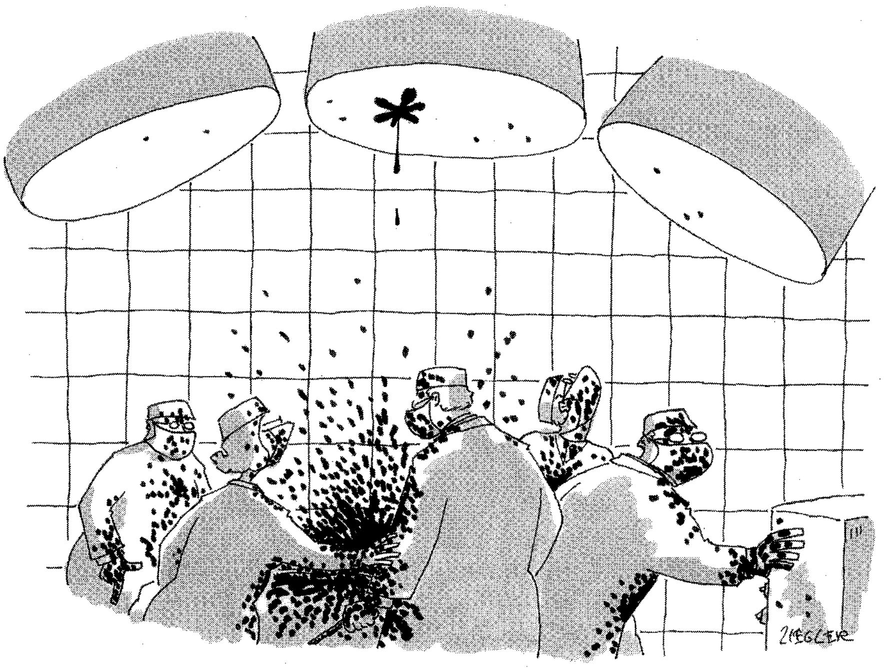
drolly tallying the number of times athletes said “Y’know” during interviews. He also had a sometimes overbearing self-certainty. When he was twenty-three, he told Bill MacPhail, the former CBS Sports executive who had overseen the introduction of instant replay, that MacPhail didn’t know anything about television sports. In an argument with one of his supervisors at UPI, he so forcefully advocated his position (“God damn it, this is the minor leagues here,” he said, “and it’s things like this that are keeping us the minor leagues”) that he was fired that afternoon. (The Wire Service Guild stepped in and saved his job.) His three-year career at CNN was, he says, “a continuing pitched battle.” He moved to a television station in Boston, and lasted a few months. At the age of twenty-five, he moved back home, a flameout, with few prospects. His agent sent his highlight tapes to stations around the country, but most station managers didn’t quite know what to make of him. “The standard response,” he says, “was ‘I like him, but is Baltimore ready for him?’ ”

Jeff Wald, who was then the news director of KTLA Channel 5, in Los Angeles, had heard the stories, but he saw Olbermann’s tapes, and was curious. “I just said, ‘He’s the guy,’” Wald recalls. “Regardless of the baggage he may or may not have, I want to meet this guy and see if he’s the real deal. And he was.”

Wald wanted someone unusual, and he got it. For one thing, Olbermann almost certainly was the only television sportscaster in Los Angeles who didn’t drive. Olbermann, who is six feet three and a half, once bumped his head while leaping into a subway car; it permanently upset his equilibrium, which makes driving a trial. (He says he loses depth perception at speeds greater than fifteen miles per hour.) He also hates flying, and that made it difficult to follow the local teams, but it was just as well; Olbermann firmly resisted the chumminess that often develops between sports journalists and their subjects. Wald says that the only argument he had with Olbermann came when Olbermann refused an assignment to cover spring training. “He thought that was going to compromise his objectivity and reporting,” Wald recalls. “I didn’t know at the time that he didn’t like to fly, but I think that he was probably right in his reasons.”

In 1992, Olbermann joined ESPN, where his erudite, wise-guy style flowered into an artful, full-blown satire of the cliché-ridden form: “That’s a six-four-three double play if you’re scoring at home. Or if you’re by yourself.”

Olbermann’s tenure at ESPN was characteristically contentious. One of his co-anchors, Suzy Kolber, has said that Olbermann was sometimes so overbearing that she would lock herself in the bathroom and cry. Another colleague, Mike Soltys, has said that when Olbermann left the network, in 1997, “he didn’t burn bridges here—he napalmed them.”



“Yee-ouch! That’s gotta hurt.”

Olbermann was glad enough to be leaving the grind of full-time sportscasting behind. His new job brought him out of the toy department and into the news side of broadcasting, with a show on NBC’s new cable-news channel, MSNBC. The producer of the broadcast, called “The Big Show,” was Phil Griffin, who was delighted to be working with Olbermann again. But in 1998, when the news cycle was hijacked by the Monica Lewinsky scandal, Olbermann found himself the anchor of a nightly newscast called “White House in Crisis.” He grew so weary of the story that getting him on the air every day became a battle. “Keith just didn’t want to go there,” Griffin recalls. “He didn’t want to do the story, and it evolved into the hottest story of the time. It made my life miserable. It was bad. And it did not end pretty.”

Once again, Olbermann left a job unhappily, returning to sportscasting at Fox Sports. He was subsequently fired, and the remainder of his contract was paid off. (“I fired him,” Rupert Murdoch said recently. “He’s crazy.”)

But Phil Griffin continued to admire Olbermann’s on-air talents, and helped to bring him back to MSNBC in 2003, to do a new show called “Countdown.” Shortly afterward, Griffin ran into an old colleague at CNN, who told him that that network had considered hiring Olbermann, but focus-group tests showed that audiences didn’t like him. “I can honestly tell you it shook me up a little bit,” Griffin recalls. “But we knew what we were getting.” He added, “I’ve known Keith for twenty-seven years. CNN. First day he was in TV, I knew right away that Keith had something that I’d never seen. He was made for this. I mean, the guy is crazy, but he is made for this.”

Olbermann chose his office, a corner office on the fourth floor of NBC’s Rockefeller Plaza headquarters, for its view. From his desk, he can look out the window and see, directly across Sixth Avenue, the studios of Fox News, the broadcast home of his rival Bill O’Reilly. “Sometimes I imagine that I hear a howl coming from there,” Olbermann told me during a visit one afternoon. “I have been accused of having an obsession with him. I am a minor-leaguer compared to his obsession with me."

The Olbermann-O'Reilly feud, which is wholly Olbermann's creation, began with a wisecrack in 2003, the first year of "Countdown." It evolved after Olbermann instituted a farcical segment called "The Worst Person in the World," in which O'Reilly, depicted as a pompous buffoon, was regularly cited. O'Reilly, the biggest draw of the highest-rated cable-news network, could only lose by engaging with Olbermann, but he could not resist. Refusing to mention Olbermann by name, he sponsored a petition drive to have him replaced, and eventually began to aim on-air broadsides against NBC's parent company, General Electric, and its chairman, Jeffrey Immelt. "If my child were killed in Iraq, I would blame the likes of Jeffrey Immelt," O'Reilly asserted in April, citing G.E.'s business relationship with Iran. (The company began phasing out its contracts there in 2005.) This only encouraged Olbermann, who subjected Bill-O (as Olbermann calls him) to near-daily barrages of acid caricature. Instead of using video clips of O'Reilly for his routines, Olbermann began voicing O'Reilly's words himself, in a demonic mimicry of the Ted Baxter character on "The Mary Tyler Moore Show."

When "Countdown" was still new, in 2004, Rick Kaplan, then the president of MSNBC, told Olbermann that he wanted the program to be the cable network's "newscast of record." Largely owing to the license that Olbermann took in his on-air duelling with O'Reilly, it has become more like a nightly political insult-comedy routine. Olbermann's Fox-bashing struck a chord with a core audience deeply sympathetic to the view that the conservative-leaning Fox News ("Fox Noise," Olbermann calls it) has degraded journalism "in the same sense that George Bush lowered and made even more disreputable the Presidency of the United States."

"Bill O'Reilly *made* Keith Olbermann," Phil Griffin says. Olbermann concurs, saying, "I really do owe him a percentage of my salary."

The O'Reilly feud was the gateway to Olbermann's emergence as a political polemicist. It was a short leap from denigrating Bill-O to Olbermann's first "Special Comment," aimed at then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, in August, 2006. While waiting out a flight delay in Los Angeles, Olbermann read the highlights of a speech that Rumsfeld had just delivered to the American Legion, in which he charged that some critics of the Administration's war plan suffered "moral or intellectual confusion about what is right or wrong." Downing "a couple of screwdrivers," Olbermann says, he wrote a rebuke of the Defense Secretary, which he read on the air the next day. "The man who sees absolutes where all other men see nuances and shades of meaning is either a prophet or a quack," he began. "Donald H. Rumsfeld is not a prophet." Olbermann went on to lecture Rumsfeld about the workings of a democracy and the nature of fascism, and concluded by quoting from Edward R. Murrow's 1954 denunciation of Joseph McCarthy and McCarthyism. He says that he didn't know how the commentary would play, with the NBC brass or with the audience. "I really did think, Well, if this is the end of my career, I will have gone down for a good cause."

His bosses loved it. "I think we're onto something," the president of NBC News, Steve Capus, told me. "That's what we keep hearing from the audience, more and more, is that they appreciate that we have people who are actually speaking truth to power, or being transparent in their own personal viewpoints." That's another way of saying that liberals, after many failed attempts, seem finally to have found their own Bill O'Reilly. Fox News still dominates the cable competition, and MSNBC over all continues to lag behind second-place CNN. O'Reilly's audience is more than twice as big as Olbermann's, which airs in the same prime-time period. But Olbermann's ratings grew by nearly seventy-five per cent the year he began doing Special Comments, and the show is making money, a rare hit in MSNBC's twelve-year run. "All of a sudden, he took off," Griffin says. "In ways that MSNBC never had a show take off."

Olbermann's success, like O'Reilly's, is evidence of viewer cocooning—the inclination to seek out programming that reinforces one's own firmly held political views. "People want to identify," Griffin says. "They want the shortcut. 'Wow, that guy's smart. I get him.' In this crazy world of so much information, you look for places where you identify, or you see where you fit into the spectrum, because you get all this information all day long."

Capus and Griffin insist that Olbermann's broadcast is like an opinion section in a newspaper, suitable to what they call MSNBC's "cable sensibility." Olbermann differs. He begins each "Countdown" with the Beethoven theme from NBC's "Huntley-Brinkley Report," and concludes with Murrow's signature sign-off, "Good night, and good luck." He maintains that "Countdown" is very much part of that continuum. "It is a newscast with commentary and analysis, the way most really good newscasts used to be," he says. "Dosages of the various components vary in a greater degree than we're used to, or maybe were even done in the heyday of this kind of thing. But if you listen to those daily Murrow newscasts in the forties on the radio, Murrow would do the news, two and a half, three minutes, take a break, and then do a two- or three-minute commentary." It could be argued that Murrow's work in wartime London—he would report on the Battle of Britain, and also advocate against continued American neutrality in the war—is hardly the same thing as telling the President to "shut the hell up," or posing the question regarding Bush (as Olbermann did): "Pathological Presidential Liar or an Idiot-in-Chief?"

But Olbermann contends that the labored pretense of neutrality in the news business is a fruitless exercise. "There are people who, with absolute conviction, believe that Brian Williams is a Communist," he said. "There are people who, with absolute conviction, believe that Katie Couric is in the pay of the Pentagon. There are people who are absolutely certain that Charlie Gibson sleeps with Hillary Clinton, based on the last debate. This is an old schoolyard thing I learned from being repeatedly beat up in the fourth grade. It finally dawned on me one day—they are going to keep beating me up whether I respond to them or not." Olbermann continued, "Brian sometimes looks like his collar button is going to burst from the restraint that he has. I know the pain that he goes through; he measures each word like an apothecary—and they beat him up, too. The point is, why not? Why not add something to the discourse?"

Some might find Olbermann's frequent invocation of Murrow, and, especially, his appropriation of Murrow's sign-off, wildly presumptuous. But when, in 2005, CBS was looking for a permanent replacement for Dan Rather network executives met with Olbermann twice about the prospect of his becoming the anchor of the "CBS Evening News."

After Rather's unhappy departure from CBS, the network's president, Leslie Moonves, said that he wanted to blow up the "Evening News"—by which he meant, he later explained, that he wanted to do away with the program's outmoded "broadcast of record" posture, and its accompanying burden of summarizing the world in twenty-two minutes each night. Moonves and Andrew Heyward, then the president of CBS News, held a secret meeting with Olbermann at his apartment, and asked how he would approach the "Evening News" job. Olbermann, who was nearing the end of his contract at MSNBC, said he thought that it was a waste for networks to spend so much money on their anchors, when they shared so much airtime with field correspondents. Olbermann said that he would, of course, be less freewheeling than he had been at "Countdown," and that he would redirect the broadcast incrementally, beginning with a three-minute block at the end of each newscast to which he would apply his personal touch. "Maybe in a year's time, after you've given me those three minutes to sort of reprogram, maybe I'll get four or five," Olbermann says now. "You don't go in for the full revolution. You do not come on and do 'Naked News.'"

The meeting ended, and Heyward was not convinced that Olbermann was the right choice for an institution where even the use of music in a news report, let alone voice impersonations by the anchor, is strictly forbidden. But soon afterward Heyward was replaced as news-division president by the head of CBS Sports, Sean McManus, who agreed to a second meeting with Olbermann, at CBS News headquarters on West Fifty-seventh Street. In the end, CBS hired Katie Couric—a decision, Olbermann likes to point out, that has not worked as well as had been hoped. (Couric consistently comes in third in the network ratings.)

Asked about the prospect of an Olbermann reign at "CBS Evening News," Sandy Socolow, Walter Cronkite's final executive producer, responded emphatically. "Oh, no, no, no, he's not a newsman," Socolow said. "He's not a reporter. I've never seen anything that he's done that was original, in terms of the information. It's all derivative. I like him, I agree with his perspective, and I think he's very, very good on television. But he's not a newsman." Socolow added, "Ten years ago, if he had done at CBS what he does every day on the air at MSNBC, he would have been fired by the end of the day."

Olbermann himself thinks that he could succeed in the traditional nightly network-news slot. "I think it would not do any worse than the three that are out there now," he says. "It would not get more than double the amount of protest that any of the shows have now."

At a celebration of the fifth anniversary of "Countdown," this spring, Phil Griffin praised Olbermann as a transformative figure in broadcasting. "Keith went into sports and changed sports," Griffin said. "And now he's doing that in news." There are those at NBC News who worry that Griffin may be right.

NBC is alone among the traditional broadcast networks in having its own twenty-four-hour cable-news channel, which presents NBC News with a distinct advantage over its competitors, as well as inevitable institutional tensions. In a time of constrained news budgets and diminishing airtime for news on the main broadcast schedule, having a huge cable-news hole to fill demands a significant commitment of resources. NBC News is likelier to assign full-time coverage of a big story, say, if it can amortize the cost across both its cable and its broadcast operations. For television journalists, for whom airtime is everything, a cable network means frequent exposure throughout the day, rather than two minutes on the "Nightly News." When the late Tim Russert, the Washington bureau chief of NBC News, realized last year that the Democratic Presidential nominating process might become a once-in-a-lifetime political story, he volunteered to become a regular contributor to MSNBC's broadcasts. Other NBC News stars, such as Brian Williams, the White House correspondent David Gregory, and the chief foreign-affairs correspondent, Andrea Mitchell, followed Russert's path.

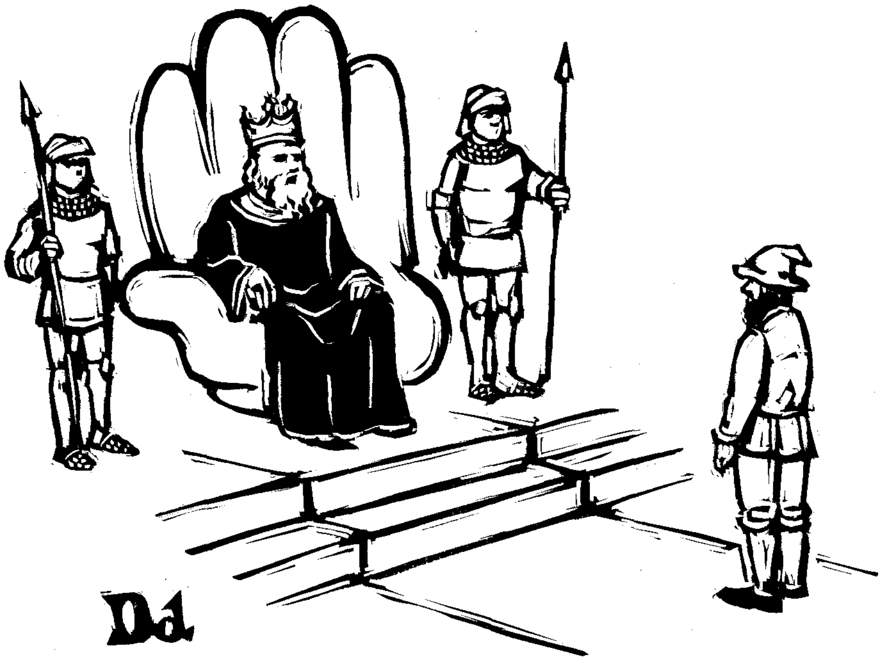
Such reporters bring to the cable side a grounding in traditional network-news standards and proprieties, a set of norms rooted in the very beginnings of broadcast news. Network-news departments adopted the structures, the language, and the guiding principles of serious print journalism—a central tenet of which was the conceit of objective neutrality.

As Russert put it to me shortly before his death, "Keith and I have each carved out our roles in this vast information spectrum." He continued, "What cable emphasizes, more and more, is opinion, or even advocacy. Whether it's Bill O'Reilly or Keith Olbermann or Lou Dobbs, that's what that particular platform or venue does. It's not what I do. What I do is different. I try very, very hard not to come up and say to people, 'This is what I believe,' or 'This is good,' or 'This is bad.' But, rather, 'This is what I'm learning in my reporting,' or 'This is what my analysis shows based on my reporting.' And as long as I can do that I'm very, very comfortable. And nobody has asked me to do anything but that."

At Fox News and MSNBC, the old pieties do hold less sway. Cable-news culture is informed more by the new media, blogs, and talk radio. "Cable's about rejection," Griffin says. "Ninety-nine per cent of the people are passing you by. You try to stop them and grab them. That's most of cable news. And then there are the élite in cable news—Olbermann, O'Reilly. They have audiences that come to them—and they're unique."

In cable news, the dominant personality puts an identifying stamp on the entire organization. The stamp at MSNBC is indisputably that of Keith Olbermann. The television gossip pages occasionally report grumblings of some NBC News personalities about Olbermann's dominion at MSNBC, but most, even the traditionalists, seem happy for the airtime, and glad that Olbermann's success redounds to them. As Olbermann puts it, "A rising tide lifts all boats."

Olbermann's central place at MSNBC is nowhere more evident than in the network's extensive political coverage. One on-air promotional ad extolled MSNBC as "The Place for Politics": it showed a full-screen image of Olber-



"You may approach the giant novelty chair."

mann, followed by smaller images of such NBC News figures as Russert, Williams, Mitchell, and Tom Brokaw, who were presented in groups of four. The ad reflected the decision, made in 2006 by NBC News managers, to install Olbermann as co-anchor of MSNBC's election coverage, along with Chris Matthews, the host of "Hardball."

"Ultimately, that's the viewers' call," Olbermann says. "If they are watching me in larger numbers than anything else on the network, it would behoove the network to put me on as often as possible, especially in a political context."

MSNBC's election coverage is, by default, the political coverage of NBC News. Throughout the protracted Democratic-primary season, after the twenty-two-minute "Nightly News" broadcast went off the air on a big night, NBC's coverage—and its news stars—moved across the studio to MSNBC, where coverage was co-anchored by a broadcaster who makes his personal perspective plainly known. The risk for NBC News is that this commingling has colored the NBC News brand, so carefully burnished over the generations, with the attitudes and predilections of the cable arm.

"Listen, it's a strain," says Tom Brokaw, the longtime anchor of "Nightly News," who remains an active and revered figure at NBC. "And it's under constant examination. There's dialogue going on behind the scenes all the time. It's not perfectly sorted out."

Brokaw calls this moment in the news media "the second big bang." "We are creating a new universe, and it has all kinds of new laws and science and physics coming into play as well, in this information world," he told me. "And you've got planets out there colliding with each other, new life forms taking shape; others have drifted too close to the sun, and they've burned up. And we don't know how it's all going to settle down. And it has, now and forevermore, a radiant effect."

Shortly after Olbermann's "shut the hell up" commentary on President Bush last month, conservative radio pounced on the implication that he was calling American troops in Iraq "cold-blooded killers," and Olbermann took particular note of criticism from Laura Ingraham, who said on the air, "I believe MSNBC really needs to bring in a medical team at this point. . . . I don't know what happened to him. I really don't. He didn't use to be this way." (Olbermann dated Ingraham briefly a decade ago. "There were a few problems," he told me. "There were a few things that I could see were going to be impediments. Oddly, they were not political things.")

On his next broadcast, Olbermann said that he hadn't been referring to American troops as "cold-blooded killers." He'd meant people in the Pentagon, and contractors like Blackwater. Citing Ingraham by name, he said, "I cannot imagine that kind of evil knee-jerk reflex" that would have caused anyone to suppose he'd been talking about the troops.

In May, after NBC broadcast an interview by Richard Engel with President Bush, Ed Gillespie, the White House counsel, sent Steve Capus a thousand-word letter of complaint, objecting to the editing of the interview but also broadly suggesting a creeping partisanship at NBC News. "Mr. Capus," Gillespie wrote, "I'm sure you don't want people to conclude that there is really no distinction between the 'news' as reported on NBC and the 'opinion' as reported on MSNBC, despite the increasing blurring of those lines." Gillespie's complaint mentioned Olbermann by name.

Charges of media unfairness from a Republican White House are unremarkable, and were regarded as such by NBC. "We always read with great interest what the White House sends us," Brian Williams said. "And we wake up the next day and do what we do for a living."

The long Democratic-nomination process, with its rancorously divided Democratic base, presented a particular challenge to MSNBC on the question of journalistic slant. Over time, some sensed a discernible tilt toward Barack Obama in the tone of the cable network's political coverage, especially in the banter of its anchors. Matthews, who is given to bursts of on-air exuberance ("like an out-of-control sprinkler system," Olbermann says), uttered the season's most memorable line when, after an Obama speech, he said, "My, I felt this thrill going up my leg!" Olbermann's preference for Obama was less graphically put, and longer in coming, but it was far more insistent.

Olbermann says that he began the campaign season determined to remain neutral on the Democratic race, although he was plainly friendly with the Clintons. (During an interview with Bill Clinton in 2006, Olbermann handed the former President a personal donation to the Clinton Foundation.) Olbermann liked Obama, but he believed, at first, that he would not make a strong candidate. As the tide began to turn Obama's way, Olbermann began to grow impatient with Clinton surrogates' attacks on Obama, and, seemingly, with the persistence of the candidate herself. As Obama neared apparent assurance of the nomination, Olbermann began to raise questions about Clinton's arithmetic on the popular vote, about her wanting to change the rules regarding the Florida and Michigan primaries, about why she didn't just do the right thing and get out.

The potential difficulty for NBC regarding Hillary Clinton became clear early in the primary season, during MSNBC's coverage of the New Hampshire primary. The entire MSNBC team, transported by Obama's victory in Iowa a week earlier, plainly anticipated an Obama win (as did much of the rest of the press), a view that was only scarcely contained on the air, while the polls were still open. Clinton, of course, won New Hampshire, which prompted a gentle on-air warning from Tom Brokaw to his colleagues to stay out of "the business of making judgments before the polls have closed and trying to stampede, in effect, the process." He added, "I think that the people out there are going to begin to make some judgments about us, if they haven't already, if we don't begin to temper that temptation to constantly try to get ahead of what the voters are deciding."

Brokaw says he sometimes feels that he has been cast in the role of hall monitor at NBC News; if so, his charges have kept him busy. The day after the New Hampshire primary, Matthews asserted that Hillary Clinton owed her election as senator to public sympathy for her in light of her husband's sexual peccadilloes. "It was completely out of line," Brokaw says. "And Keith took it to another level" with his "shut the hell up" commentary.

In March, after Geraldine Ferraro said that Obama would not be where he is if he were not a black man, Olbermann issued a Special Comment that was aimed expressly at Clinton's advisers (and their countenancing of Ferraro's "cheap, ignorant, vile racism") but that struck Clinton nonetheless. "Voluntarily or inadvertently," Olbermann said, addressing Clinton directly, "you are still awash in this filth."

At MSNBC, Phil Griffin was worried, and with good reason. The average "Countdown" viewer is fifty-nine years old, and forty-five per cent of the viewers are women, presumably Democratic—a fair description of a Hillary Clinton supporter. Griffin believed that Olbermann was beginning to alienate his core audience, and asked him to ease up a bit on Clinton, and possibly even make some conciliatory gesture to the Clinton camp. Olbermann was offended by the suggestion. "I can't do that!" he says, recalling that conversation. "Me doing a commentary against my own opinion is pandering. Black and white. And I'm not going to do it. Would I pull back a little bit, or think long and hard about whether or not I want to knowingly alienate part of the audience? Yeah. And I did. I mean, I held fire on Senator Clinton for quite a while after she began to really scare me, with some of these tactics."

On May 23rd, at an editorial-board meeting in South Dakota, Clinton was asked, again, whether she should drop out of the race for the good of the Party. Clinton, saying she would not, employed a historical reference meant to remind her listeners that the nomination process had extended into June in previous primary campaigns. "My husband did not wrap up the nomination in 1992 until he won the California primary somewhere in the middle of June, right? We all remember Bobby Kennedy was assassinated in June in California."

For those willing to ascribe iniquity to all things Clinton, the remark was shocking. "Why, in the name of all that all of us hold dear, would anybody ever say anything like this?" Olbermann asked, at the beginning of his broadcast that night. "Can she in good conscience continue in the race for President after having said anything like this? Is her political career at an end?" At the conclusion of his show, Olbermann subjected Clinton to the Special Comment treatment. Assuming a posture of animated outrage, Olbermann blasted Clinton for nearly eleven minutes, suggesting that her remarks were calculated and "heartless." He recited a number of sins for which Clinton had already been forgiven, from her landing-under-fire-in-Bosnia claim to her exploitation of the Jeremiah Wright controversy.

"This, Senator, is too much," he concluded. "Because a senator, a politician, a person who can let hang in midair the prospect that she might just be sticking around, in part, just in case the other guy gets shot has no business being, and no capacity to be, the President of the United States."

Toward the end of the primary season, with Montana and South Dakota going for Obama and Clinton, respectively, on June 3rd, Olbermann earned another on-air scolding from Brokaw after asserting that Clinton was "trying to shoehorn her way" into the coverage of the presumed nominees of the two parties. "I think that's unfair, Keith," Brokaw said. "When you look at the states that she won and the popular vote that she piled up, and the number of delegates that she has on her side, she's got real bargaining power in all of this."

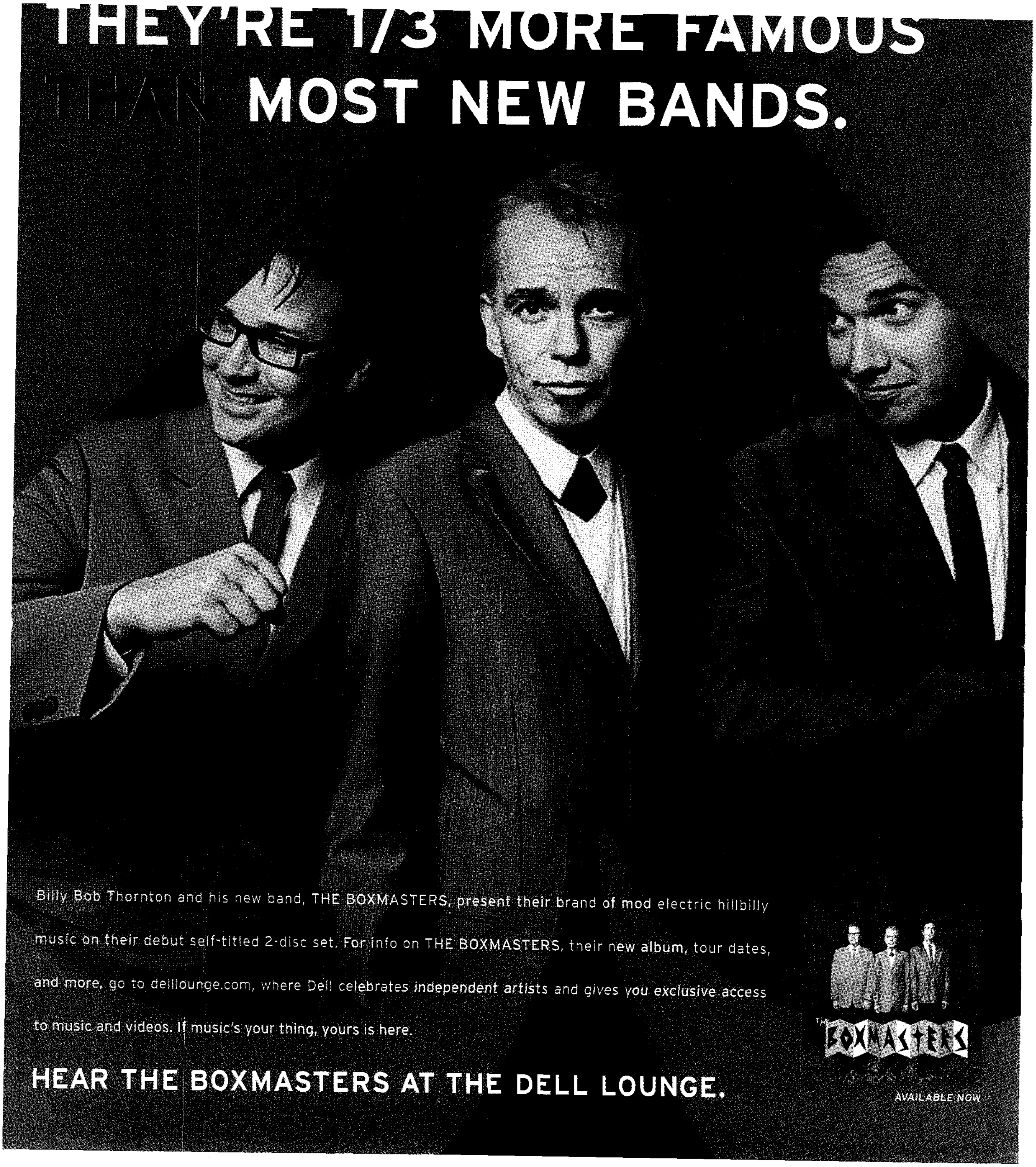
Olbermann was in a more conciliatory mood toward Clinton by the time she finally suspended her campaign and endorsed Obama. Of that speech, on Saturday, June 7th, Olbermann observed, "It was marbled, it was striated," and, of the section in which Clinton praised Obama, "I mean, six home runs, six minutes' worth of home runs, one after the other, out of the ballpark."

But, just as Obama must work to win Clinton supporters for the fall campaign, Phil Griffin has to repair a fractured audience base, a portion of which saw sexism in his network's Clinton coverage and vowed to boycott MSNBC. Griffin knows that some of that anger is aimed at his star anchor. "It was, like, you meet a guy and you fall in love with him, and he's funny and he's clever and he's witty, and he's all these great things," Griffin said of the relationship between Olbermann and the Clinton supporters among his viewers. "And then you commit yourself to him, and he turns out to be a jerk and difficult and brutal. And that is how the Hillary viewers see him. It's true. But I do think they're going to come back. There's nowhere else to go."

Griffin added that a certain level of stress is part of the job of managing Keith Olbermann. "You ride the horse, and you start winning, and then all of a sudden you're off. And we're just riding, full speed. And it can be a dangerous ride." ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Peter J. Boyer talks about Keith Olbermann.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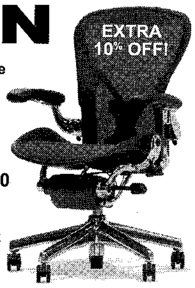

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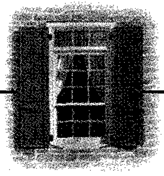

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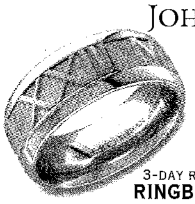

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

ANTIHEROES

BY GEORGE SAUNDERS

I just had a great idea for a TV show: People from all over the world begin to sense they have superpowers. One guy can fly. Another can walk through walls. A cheerleader is impervious to physical harm. A kid can move back and forth in time. You get the idea: normal people, sick and tired of living under constraint, are busting out, into a world without limits!

But here's the twist: These people, who believe they have superpowers? They don't. They never have and never will. There is no such thing as a superpower.

The guy who thinks he can fly? Jumps off his minivan and sprains his ankle. The one who can walk through walls? Tries to run through the living-room wall and breaks a photograph of his wife's mother. His wife is really upset. The cheerleader impervious to physical harm throws herself down a flight of stairs, breaks her back, then lies there waiting for it to miraculously mend. But no. The cat steps over her. So much for cheerleading. The kid who thinks he can move back and forth through time decides to exit a math test early by time-transporting himself back to Mozart's Vienna. He tries and tries, so hard that he finally farts really loudly in a wet double-burst. The other kids crack up. He tries to time-transport himself back to the instant before the fart, so he can withhold the fart, but no: he tries so hard, he farts again. The classroom just dissolves into uncontrollable laughter. Even the teacher drops her head to her desk, shoulders heaving.

A housewife who can cause objects to levitate destroys the family aquarium. An elderly woman whose superpower is that she can speak telepathically to animals gets bit by a squirrel. When, using her mind, she asks the squirrel why, it bites her again, then dashes up a tree. A stripper whose superpower is that she can read an entire book just by picking it up goes into a bookstore and keeps picking books up and putting them down, a quizzical look on her face, wearing a crop-top and spike heels. A nun in New Mexico whose superpower is the ability to make delicious bread using any ingredients on hand, even mud, even dead bugs, makes a loaf of bread that all the other nuns decline to eat.

"I actually just ate," one says.

"Honestly, Sister, I have an upset stomach," protests another.

A Virginia boy whose superpower is that he can throw a wad of paper into his trash can misses sixteen times in a row. Even when he goes right up to the can and drops the wad directly down, it hits the edge and drops into his gym shoe. Maybe that's my superpower, he thinks: whenever I throw a wad of paper, it lands in my gym shoe. He throws a wad of paper out the door of his room, to see if it will boomerang back and land in one of his gym shoes. But no. His octogenarian grandfather is just then hobbling by and the wad of paper hits him in the side of the head. He is so old he doesn't even notice, just keeps hobbling. His superpower is: he can make it to the bathroom on time whenever he likes.

On the outskirts of town, an aging balding bachelor's superpower is: he can take a box of his mother's precious stupid vintage glassware and hurl it down the basement stairs and not a single piece will break. Later in the day, as he waits for her to get home, his superpower is: when she comes in, he will make a Cloud of Forgetting form around her head. Or, failing that, a Cloud of Not Really Liking That Glassware Anyway, Sweetie. At this point, as her car pulls up, oh God, he would settle for the superpower of: can make his knees stop shaking under the table whenever he likes. Jesus, she's going to absolutely smite him.

Her superpower is: can cause the front door to open using only her mind.

He hears her head slam into the closed door, as usual. Then, as usual, she swears under her breath, goes for her keys.

Down the block, more disappointment: Kenny Dennis stands outside the home of Amelia St. Laurent, trying to gaze through her bedroom wall. But no. All he can see is the wall. Then he gets stung by a wasp. He kills the wasp with his shoe. Then, ah, jeez, here comes Amelia herself, face all scrunched up, because she's trying to burst into flame. But no. She's only succeeding in giving herself a big migraine. And why the hell is Kenny Dennis standing there with his shoe in his hand? Just then an arrow enters Kenny's hip, fired by Fred Lowry, whose superpower is: can fire an arrow in any direction whatsoever but still hit the bull's-eye on a target set up over at the high school via directing the arrow's course with his mind. Lowry's high-tailing it up the street, red-faced, bow under his arm, when he's struck by an Omni driven by the blindfolded Leonard Metz, whose superpower is: has a tiny functioning eye in each fingertip.

Soon, in a plot twist, people begin losing even their normal abilities. A Japanese woman forgets how to speak Japanese. A Texas mother forgets how to chew, and that her kids are supposed to wear pants. Her husband also loses an essential ability he's always had, which is: whenever he wants to have an affair, he just has it. It's like he totally forgets he's married. After these affairs, he manifests a secondary ability: forgets he's had the affair, doesn't feel the slightest bit guilty.

Today, he goes out, has an affair. But right in the middle he remembers he's married. Lori's a nice girl—why must he always do her wrong? Sexually, he performs not so great. His partner's also sad. Her superpower is: whenever she has a sleazy affair, the guy's always at least adequate in the sack.

When he gets home, Lori's at the table, mouth full of chips. The kids are running around the yard in their underwear. What gives? No wonder he cheats on Lori.

Nothing, anywhere, is getting done. There's great fear in the air. What fools we were, to take our basic abilities for granted! How wonderful life was, back when we still knew how to drive cars, button shirts, call for takeout, paint a series of watercolors depicting various views of our summer house, find our damn summer house in the first place.

The entire population of earth just stumbles around, slowly starving to death and/or perishing of thirst and/or dying of sunburn or of walking right up to and petting a tiger in the wild, and so forth: an absolute apocalypse of ineptitude.

In this way, my TV show is like life, where people's abilities always fall short of their hopes and aspirations and the extent of their love. This will be great for ratings. It will make my show *relatable.*

The first season ends like this: We zoom down, into a lonely room. There sits a guy who has lost an ability he's always had: can easily find a pithy way to end a comic piece of writing.

He's been up all night revising the bastard, trying to find a decent ending, but nothing's coming. His face is a contorted mask of desperation. We zoom in closer. His eyes are filled with utter insanity. It used to be so easy for him. How is he going to get out of this? How, how, how?

Wait. He's got it! For sure! Holy cow, he's done it! Not only has he come up with a killer ending; he's broken the downward spiral of incompetence infecting all mankind! He'll finish the piece, then rush out to tell the others, *You can break free, as I have broken free with my miraculous ending! Yes, life is full of trouble, but we are walking miracles, able to rise above any—*

Wait a second. That ending . . . actually, now that he thinks about it, it doesn't exactly . . .

Yeah. Doesn't make sense.

Unless he—

No. Still doesn't work.

Crap.

He swears aloud, tears the page from his typewriter, is about to rip it into halves, then quarters, then eighths, and throw it into the air and laugh maniacally as it falls around him like snow. But then he realizes he's forgotten how to tear paper, throw paper, or laugh maniacally.

He turns back to the typewriter.

"Woe is us," he intends to type.

"Woas ass," he types.

Then he bursts into tears, an ability that, apparently, is one of the last a human being ever loses. ♦

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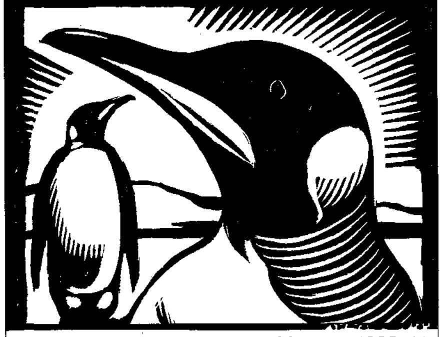

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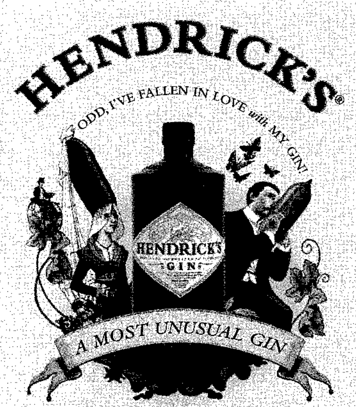

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ANNALS OF TECHNOLOGY

HELLO, HAL

Will we ever get a computer we can really talk to?

BY JOHN SEABROOK

Not long ago, a caller dialled the toll-free number of an energy company to inquire about his bill. He reached an interactive-voice-response system, or I.V.R.—the automated service you get whenever you dial a utility or an airline or any other big American company. I.V.R.s are the speaking tube that connects corporate America to its clients. Companies profess boundless interest in their customers, but they don't want to pay an employee to talk to a caller if they can avoid it; the average human-to-human call costs the company at least five dollars. Once an I.V.R. has been paid for, however, a human-to-I.V.R. call costs virtually nothing.

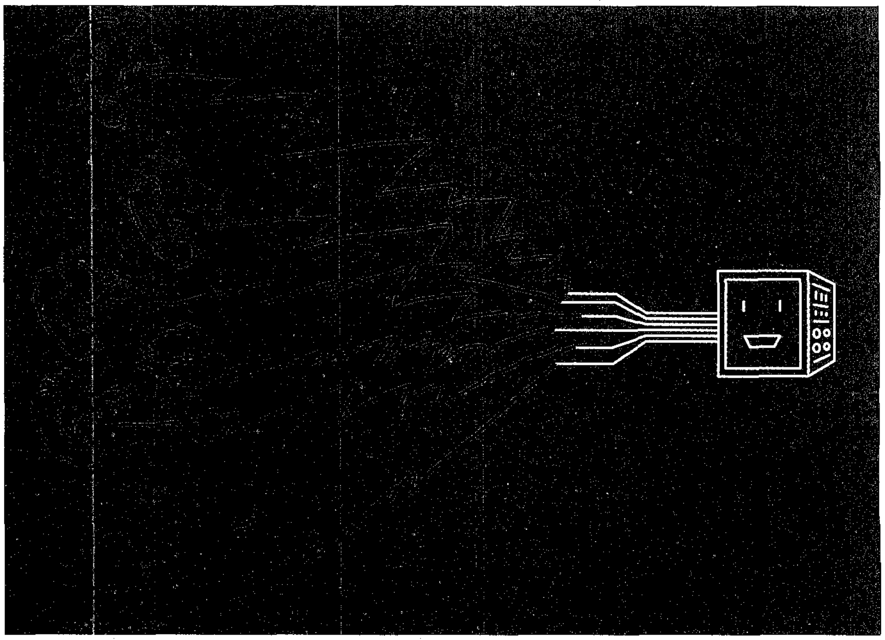
"If you have an emergency, press one," the utility company's I.V.R. said. "To use our automated services or to pay by phone, press two."

The caller punched two, and was instructed to enter his account number, which he did. An alert had been placed on the account because of a missed payment. "Please hold," the I.V.R. said. "Your call is being transferred to a service representative." This statement was followed by one of the most commonly heard sentences in the English language: "Your call may be monitored."

In fact, the call *was* being monitored, and I listened to it some months later, in the offices of B.B.N. Technologies, a sixty-year-old company, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Joe Alwan, a vice-president and the general manager of the division that makes B.B.N.'s "caller-experience analytics" software, which is called Avoke, was showing me how the technology can automatically create a log of events in a call, render the speech as text, and make it searchable.

Alwan, a compact man with scrunched-together features who has been at B.B.N. for two years, spoke rapidly but smoothly, with a droll delivery. He projected a graphic of the voice onto a screen at one end of the room. "Anger's the big one," he said. Companies can use Avoke to determine when their callers are getting angry, so that they can improve their I.V.R.s.

The agent came on the line, said his name was Eric, and asked the caller to explain his problem. Eric had a slight Indian accent and spoke in a high, clear voice. He probably worked at a call center in Bangalore for a few dollars an hour, although his pay was likely based on how efficiently he could process the calls. "The company doesn't want to spend more money on the call, because it's a cost," Alwan said. The caller's voice gave the impression that he was white (particularly the way he pronounced the "u" in "*duuude*") and youthful, around thirty:



The challenge is to marry our two greatest technologies: language and toolmaking.

R.O. BLECHMAN AND NICHOLAS BLECHMAN

CALLER: Hey, what's going on is, ah, I got a return-payment notice, right?

AGENT: Mhm.

CALLER: And I checked with my bank, and my bank was saying, well, it didn't even get to you . . . they didn't reject it. So then I was just, like, what's the issue, and then, ah, you guys charge to pay over the phone, so that's why it's not done over the phone, so that's why I do it on the Internet, so—

AGENT: O.K.

CALLER: So I don't . . . know what's going on.

The caller sounded relaxed, but if you listened closely you could hear his voice welling with quiet anger.

The agent quickly looked up the man's record and discovered that he had typed in his account number incorrectly. The caller accepted the agent's explanation but thought he shouldn't be liable for the returned-payment charge. He said, "There's nothing that can be done with that return fee, dude?" The agent explained that another company had levied the charge, but the caller took no notice. "I mean, I would be paying it over the phone, so you guys wanna charge people for paying over the phone, and I'll be—"

People express anger in two different ways. There's "cold" anger, in which words may be overarticulated but spoken softly, and "hot" anger, in which voices are louder and pitched higher. At first, the caller's anger was cold:

AGENT: O.K., sir. I'm gonna go ahead and explain this. . . . O.K., so on the information that you put this last time it was incorrect, so I apologize that you put it incorrectly on the site.

CALLER: O.K., we got past that, bro. So tell me something I don't know. . . .

> AGENT: Let's see . . . uh . . . um.
>
> CALLER: Dude, I don't care what company it is. It's your company using that company, so you guys charge it. So you guys should be waiving that shit-over-the-phone shit, pay by phone.
>
> AGENT: But why don't you talk to somebody else, sir. One moment.

By now, the caller's anger was hot. He was put on hold, but B.B.N. was still listening:

> CALLER: Motherfucker, I swear. You fucking pussy, you probably don't even have me on hold, you little fucked-up dick. You're gonna wait a long time, bro.
>
> You little bitch, I'll fucking find out who you are, you little fucking ho.

After thirty seconds, we could hear bubbling noises—a bong, Alwan thought—and then coughing. Not long afterward, the caller hung up.

This spring marked the fortieth anniversary of HAL, the conversational computer that was brought to life on the screen by Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke, in "2001: A Space Odyssey." HAL has a calm, empathic voice—a voice that is warmer than the voices of the humans in the movie, which are oddly stilted and false. HAL says that he became operational in Urbana, Illinois, in 1992, and offers to sing a song. HAL not only speaks perfectly; he seems to understand perfectly, too. I was a nine-year-old nerd in the making when the film came out, in 1968, and I've been waiting for a computer to talk to ever since—a fantasy shared by many computer geeks. Bill Gates has been touting speech recognition as the next big thing in computing for at least a decade. By giving computers the ability to understand speech, humankind would marry its two greatest technologies: language and toolmaking. To believers, this union can only be a matter of time.

Forty years after "2001," how close are we to talking to computers? Today, you can use your voice to buy airplane tickets, transfer money, and get a prescription filled. If you don't want to type, you can use one of the current crop of dictation programs to transcribe your speech; these have been improving steadily and now work reasonably well. If you are driving a car with an onboard navigator, you can get directions in one of dozens of different voices, according to your preference. In a car equipped with Sync—a collaboration of Ford, Microsoft, and Nuance, the largest speech-technology company in the world—you can use your voice to place a phone call or to control your iPod, both of which are useful when you are in what's known in the speech-recognition industry as "hands-busy, eyes-busy" situations. State-of-the-art I.V.R.s, such as Google's voice-based 411 service, offer natural-language understanding—you can speak almost as you would to a human operator, as opposed to having to choose from a set menu of options. I.V.R. designers create vocal personas like Julie, the perky voice that answers Amtrak's 800 number; these voices can be "tuned" according to a company's branding needs. Calling Virgin Mobile gets you a sassy-voiced young woman, who sounds as if she's got her feet up on her desk.

Still, these applications of speech technology, useful though they can be, are a far cry from HAL—a conversational computer. Computers still flunk the famous Turing Test, devised by the British mathematician Alan Turing, in which a computer tries to fool a person into thinking that it's human. And, even within limited applications, speech recognition never seems to work as well as it should. North Americans spent forty-three billion minutes on the line with an I.V.R. in 2007; according to one study, only one caller in ten was satisfied with the experience. Some companies have decided to switch back to touch-tone menus, after finding that customers prefer pushing buttons to using their voices, especially when they are inputting private information, such as account numbers. Leopard, Apple's new operating system for the Mac, responds to voice commands, which is wonderful for people with handicaps and disabilities but extremely annoying if you have to listen to Alex, its computer-generated voice, converse with a co-worker all day.

Roger Schank was a twenty-two-year-old graduate student when "2001" was released. He came toward the end of what today appears to have been a golden era of programmer-philosophers—men like Marvin Minsky and Seymour Papert, who, in establishing the field of artificial intelligence, inspired researchers to create machines

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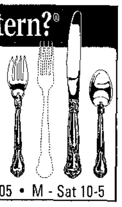

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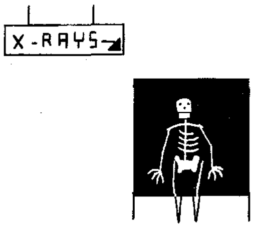
with human intelligence. Schank has spent his career trying to make computers simulate human memory and learning. When he was young, he was certain that a conversational computer would eventually be invented. Today, he's less sure. What changed his thinking? Two things, Schank told me: "One was realizing that a lot of human speech is just chatting." Computers proved to be very good at tasks that humans find difficult, like calculating large sums quickly and beating grand masters at chess, but they were wretched at this, one of the simplest of human activities. The other reason, as Schank explained, was that "we just didn't know how complicated speech was until we tried to model it." Just as sending men to the moon yielded many fundamental insights into the nature of space, so the problem of making conversational machines has taught scientists a great deal about how we hear and speak. As the Harvard cognitive scientist Steven Pinker wrote to me, "The consensus as far as I have experienced it among A.I. researchers is that natural-language processing is extraordinarily difficult, as it could involve the entirety of a person's knowledge, which of course is extraordinarily difficult to model on a computer." After fifty years of research, we aren't even close.

Speech begins with a puff of breath. The diaphragm pushes air up from the lungs, and this passes between two small membranes in the upper windpipe, known as the vocal folds, which vibrate and transform the breath into sound waves. The waves strike hard surfaces inside the head—teeth, bone, the palate. By changing the shape of the mouth and the position of the tongue, the speaker makes vowels and consonants and gives timbre, tone, and color to the sound.

That process, being mechanical, is not difficult to model, and, indeed, humans had been trying to make talking machines long before A.I. existed. In the late eighteenth century, a Hungarian inventor named Wolfgang von Kempelen built a speaking machine by modelling the human vocal tract, using a bellows for lungs, a reed from a bagpipe for the vocal folds, and a keyboard to manipulate the "mouth." By playing the keys, an operator could form complete phrases in several different languages. In the nineteenth century, Kempelen's machine was improved on by Sir Charles Wheatstone, and that contraption, which was exhibited in London, was seen by the young Alexander Graham Bell. It inspired him to try to create his own devices, in the hope of allowing non-hearing people (Bell's mother and his wife were deaf) to speak normally. He didn't succeed, but his early efforts led to the invention of the telephone.

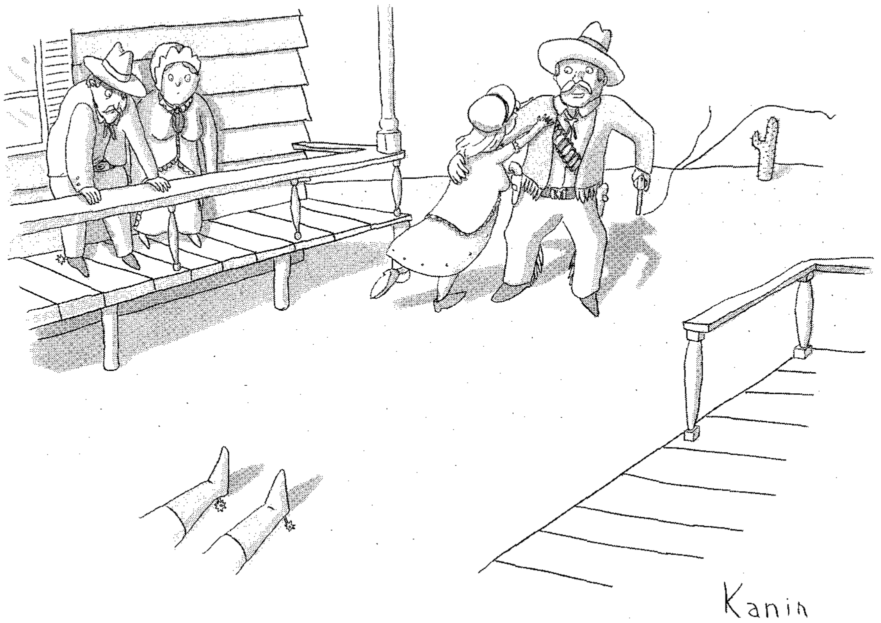
In the twentieth century, researchers created electronic talking machines. The first, called the Voder, was engineered by Bell Labs—the famed research division of A.T. & T.—and exhibited at the 1939 World's Fair, in New York. Instead of a mechanical system made of a reed and bellows, the Voder generated sounds with electricity; as with Kempelen's speaking machine, a human manipulated keys to produce words. The mechanical-sounding voice became a familiar attribute of movie robots in the nineteen-fifties (and, later, similar synthetic-voice effects were a staple of nineteen-seventies progressive rock). In the early sixties, Bell Labs programmed a computer to sing "Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do." Arthur C. Clarke, who visited the lab, heard the machine sing, and he and Kubrick subsequently used the same song in HAL's death scene.

Hearing is more complicated to model than talking, because it involves signal processing: converting sound from waves of air into electrical impulses. The fleshy part of the ear and the ear canal capture sound waves and direct them to the eardrum, which vibrates as it is struck. These vibrations then push on the ossicles, which form a three-boned lever—that Rube Goldbergian contraption of the middle ear—that helps amplify the sound. The impulses pass into the fluid of the cochlea, which is lined with tiny hairs called cilia. They translate the impulses into electrical signals, which then travel along neural pathways to the brain. Once signals reach the brain, they are "recognized," either by associative memories or by a rules-based system—or, as Pinker has argued, by some combination of the two.



The human ear is exquisitely sensitive; research has shown, for example, that people can distinguish between hot and cold coffee simply by hearing it poured. The ear is particularly attentive to the human voice. We can differentiate among different voices speaking together, and we can isolate voices in the midst of traffic and loud music, and we can tell the direction from which a voice is coming—all of which are difficult for computers to do. We can hear smiles at the other end of a telephone call; the ear recognizes the sound variations caused by the spreading of the lips. That's why call-center workers are told to smile no matter what kind of abuse they're taking.

The first attempts at speech recognition were made in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, when the A.I. pioneers tried to simulate the way the human mind apprehends language. But where do you start? Even a simple concept like "yes" might be expressed in dozens of different ways—including "yes," "ya," "yup," "yeah," "yeayuh," "yeppers," "yessirree," "aye, aye," "mmmhmm," "uh-huh," "sure," "totally," "certainly," "indeed," "affirmative," "fine," "definitely," "you bet," "you betcha," "no problemo," and "okeydoke"—and what's the rule in that? At Nuance, whose headquarters are outside Boston, speech engineers try to anticipate all the different ways people might say yes, but they still get surprised. For example, designers found that Southerners had more trouble using the system than Northerners did, because when instructed to answer "yes" or "no" Southerners regularly added "ma'am" or "sir," depending on the I.V.R.'s gender, and the computer wasn't programmed to recognize that. Also, language isn't static; the rules change. Researchers taught machines that when the pitch of a voice rises at the end of a sentence it usually means a question, only to have their work spoiled by the emergence of what linguists call "uptalk"—that Valley Girl way of making a declarative sentence sound like a question?—which is now ubiquitous across the United States.



"No need to thank me, Ma'am—I would have murdered him anyways."

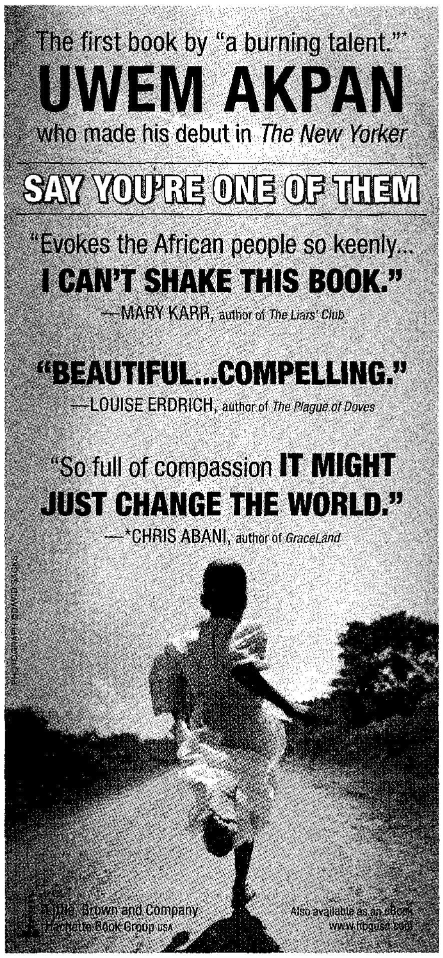
In the seventies and eighties, many speech researchers gradually moved away from efforts to determine the rules of language and took a probabilistic approach to speech recognition. Statistical "learning algorithms"—methods of constructing models from streams of data—were the wheel on which the back of the A.I. culture was broken. As David Nahamoo, the chief technology officer for speech at I.B.M.'s Thomas J. Watson Research Center, told me, "Brute-force computing, based on probability algorithms, won out over the rule-based approach." A speech recognizer, by learning the relative frequency with which particular words occur, both by themselves and within the context of other words, could be "trained" to make educated guesses. Such a system wouldn't be able to understand what words mean, but, given enough data and computing power, it might work in certain, limited vocabulary situations, like medical transcription, and it might be able to perform machine translation with a high degree of accuracy.

In 1969, John Pierce, a prominent member of the staff of Bell Labs, argued in an influential letter to the *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, entitled "Whither Speech Recognition," that there was little point in making machines that had speech recognition but no speech understanding. Regardless of the sophistication of the algorithms, the machine would still be a modern version of Kempelen's talking head—a gimmick. But the majority of researchers felt that the narrow promise of speech recognition was better than nothing.

In 1971, the Defense Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency made a five-year commitment to funding speech recognition. Four institutions—B.B.N., I.B.M., Stanford Research Institute, and Carnegie Mellon University—were selected as contractors, and each was given the same guidelines for developing a speech recognizer with a thousand-word vocabulary. Subsequently, additional projects were funded that might be useful to the military. One was straight out of "Star Trek": a handheld device that could automatically translate spoken words into other languages. Another was software that could read foreign news media and render them into English.

In addition to DARPA, funding for speech recognition came from telephone companies—principally at Bell Labs—and computer companies, most notably I.B.M. The phone companies wanted voice-based automated calling, and the computer companies wanted a voice-based computer interface and automated dictation, which was a "holy grail project" (a favorite phrase of the industry). But devising a speech recognizer that worked consistently and accurately in real-world situations proved to be much harder than anyone had anticipated. It wasn't until the early nineties that companies finally began to bring products to the consumer marketplace, but these products rarely worked as advertised. The fledgling industry went through a tumultuous period. One industry leader, Lernout & Hauspie, flamed out, in a spectacular accounting scandal.

Whether its provenance is academic or corporate, speech-recognition research is heavily dependent on the size of the data sample, or "corpus"—the sheer volume of speech you work with. The larger your corpus, the more data you can feed to the learning algorithms and the better the guesses they can make. I.B.M. collects speech not only in the lab and from broadcasts but also in the field. Andy Aaron, who works at the Watson Research Center, has spent many hours recording people driving or sitting in the front seats of cars in an effort to develop accurate speech models for automotive commands. That's because, he told me, "when people speak in cars they don't speak the same way they do in an office." For example, we talk more loudly in cars, because of a phenomenon known as the Lombard effect—the speaker involuntarily raises his voice to compensate for background noise. Aaron collects speech both for recognizers and for synthesizers—computer-generated voices. "Recording for the recognizer and for the synthesizer couldn't be more different," he said. "In the case of the recognizer, you are teaching the system to correctly identify an unknown speech sound. So you feed it lots and lots of different samples, so that it knows all the different ways Americans might say the phoneme 'oo.' A synthesizer is the opposite. You audition many professional speakers and carefully choose one, because you like the sound of his voice. Then you record that speaker for dozens of hours, saying sentences that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contain many diverse combinations of phonemes and common words."

B.B.N. came to speech recognition through its origins as an acoustical-engineering firm. It worked on the design of Lincoln Center's Philharmonic Hall in the mid-sixties, and did early research in measuring noise levels at airports, which led to quieter airplane engines. In 1997, B.B.N. was bought by G.T.E., which subsequently merged with Bell Atlantic to form Verizon. In 2004, a group of B.B.N. executives and investors put together a buyout, and the company became independent again. The speech they use to train their recognizers comes from a shared bank, the Linguistic Data Consortium.

During my visit to Cambridge, I watched as a speech engine transcribed a live Al Jazeera broadcast into more or less readable English text, with only a three-minute lag time. In another demo, software captured speech from podcasts and YouTube videos and converted it into text, with impressive accuracy—a technology that promises to make video and audio as easily searchable as text. Both technologies are now available commercially, in B.B.N.'s Broadcast Monitoring System and in EveryZing, its audio-and-video search engine. I also saw B.B.N's English-to-Iraqi Arabic translator; I had seen I.B.M.'s, known as the Multilingual Automatic Speech-to-Speech Translator, or MASTOR, the week before. Both worked amazingly well. At I.B.M., an English speaker made a comment ("We are here to provide humanitarian assistance for your town") to an Iraqi. The machine repeated his sentence in English, to make sure it was understood. The MASTOR then translated the sentence into Arabic and said it out loud. The Iraqi answered in Arabic; the machine repeated the sentence in Arabic and then delivered it in English. The entire exchange took about five seconds, and combined state-of-the-art speech recognition, voice synthesis, and machine translation. Granted, the conversation was limited to what you might discuss at a checkpoint in Iraq. Still, for what they are, these translators are triumphs of the statistics-based approach.

What's missing from all these programs, however, is emotional recognition. The current technology can capture neither the play of emphasis, rhythm, and intonation in spoken language (which linguists call prosody) nor the emotional experience of speaking and understanding language. Descartes favored a division between reason and emotion, and considered language to be a vehicle of the former. But speech without emotion, it turns out, isn't really speech. Cognitively, the words should mean the same thing, regardless of their emotional content. But they don't.

Speech recognition is a multidisciplinary field, involving linguists, psychologists, phoneticians, acousticians, computer scientists, and engineers. At speech conferences these days, emotional recognition is a hot topic. Julia Hirschberg, a professor of computer science at Columbia University, told me that at the last prosody conference she attended "it seemed like three-quarters of the presentations were on emotional recognition." Research is focussed both on how to recognize a speaker's emotional state and on how to make synthetic voices more emotionally expressive.

Elizabeth Shriberg, a senior researcher in the speech group at S.R.I. International (formerly Stanford Research Institute), said, "Especially when you talk about emotional speech, there is a big difference between acted speech and real speech." Real anger, she went on, often builds over a number of utterances, and is much more variable than acted anger. For more accurate emotional recognition, Shriberg said, "we need the kind of data that you get from 911 and directory-assistance calls. But you can't use those, for privacy reasons, and because they're proprietary."

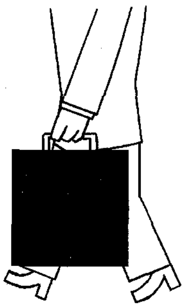
At SAIL—the Speech Analysis and Interpretation Laboratory, on the campus of the University of Southern California, in Los Angeles—researchers work mostly with scripted speech, which students collect from actors in the U.S.C. film and drama programs. Shrikanth Narayanan, who runs the lab, is an electrical engineer, and the students in his emotion-research group are mainly engineers and computer scientists. One student was studying what happens when a speaker's face and voice convey conflicting emotions.

Another was researching how emotional states affect the way people move their heads when they talk. The research itself can be a grind. Students painstakingly listen to voices expressing many different kinds of emotion and tag each sample with information, such as how energetic the voice is and its "valence" (whether it is a negative or a positive emotion). Anger and elation are examples of emotions that have different valences but similar energy; humans use context, as well as facial and vocal cues, to distinguish them. Since the researchers have only the voice to work with, at least three of them are required to listen and decide what the emotion is. Students note voice quality, pacing, language, "disfluencies" (false starts, "um"s), and pitch. They make at least two different data sets, so that they can use separate ones for training the computer and for testing it.

Facial expressions are generally thought to be universal, but so far Narayanan's lab hasn't found that similarly universal vocal cues for emotions are as clearly established. "Emotions aren't discrete," Narayanan said. "They are a continuum, and it isn't clear to any one perceiver where one emotion ends and another begins, so you end up studying not just the speaker but the perceiver." The idea is that if you could train the computer to sense a speaker's emotional state by the sound of his voice, you could also train it to respond in kind—the computer might slow down if it sensed that the speaker was confused, or assume a more soothing tone of voice if it sensed anger. One possible application of such technology would be video games, which could automatically adapt to a player's level based on the stress in his voice. Narayanan also mentioned simulations—such as the computer-game-like training exercises that many companies now use to prepare workers for a job. "The program would sense from your voice if you are overconfident, or when you are feeling frustrated, and adjust accordingly," he said. That reminded me of the moment in the novel "2001" when HAL, after discovering that the astronauts have doubts about him, decides to kill them. While struggling with one of the astronauts, Dave, for control of the ship, HAL says, "I can tell from your voice harmonics, Dave, that you're badly upset. Why don't you take a stress pill and get some rest?"

But, apart from call-center voice analytics, it's hard to find many credible applications of emotional recognition, and it is possible that true emotional recognition is beyond the limits of the probabilistic approach. There are futuristic projects aimed at making emotionally responsive robots, and there are plans to use such robots in the care of children and the elderly. "But this is very long-range, obviously," Narayanan said. In the meantime, we are going to be dealing with emotionless machines.

There is a small market for voice-based lie detectors, which are becoming a popular tool in police stations around the country. Many are made by Nemesysco, an Israeli company, using a technique called "layered voice analysis" to analyze some hundred and thirty parameters in the voice to establish the speaker's pyschological state. The academic world is skeptical of voice-based lie detection, because Nemesysco will not release the algorithms on which its program is based; after all, they are proprietary. Layered voice analysis has failed in two independent tests. Nemesysco's American distributor says that's because the tests were poorly designed. (The company played Roger Clemens's recent congressional testimony for me through its software, so that I could see for myself the Rocket's stress levels leaping.) Nevertheless, according to the distributor more than a thousand copies of the software have been sold—at fourteen thousand five hundred dollars each—to law-enforcement agencies and, more recently, to insurance companies, which are using them in fraud detection.



One of the most fully realized applications of emotional recognition that I am aware of is the aggression-detection system developed by Sound Intelligence, which has been deployed in Rotterdam and Amsterdam, and other cities in the Netherlands. It has also been installed in the English city of Coventry, and is being tested in London and Manchester. One of the designers, Peter van Hengel, explained to me that the idea grew out of a project at the University of Groningen, which simulated the workings of the inner ear with computer models. "A colleague of mine applied the same inner-ear model to trying to recognize speech amid noise," he said, "and found that it could be used to select the parts belonging to the speech and leave out the noise." They founded Sound Intelligence in 2000, initially focussing on speech-noise separation for automatic speech recognition, with a sideline in the analysis of non-speech sounds. In 2003, the company was approached by the Dutch national railroad, which wanted to be able to detect several kinds of sound that might indicate trouble in stations and on trains (glass-breaking, graffiti-spraying, and aggressive voices). This project developed into an aggression-detection system based on the sound of people shouting: the machine detects the overstressing of the vocal cords, which occurs only in real aggression. (That's one reason actors only approximate anger; the real thing can damage the voice.)

The city of Groningen has installed an aggression-detector at a busy intersection in an area full of pubs. Elevated microphones spaced thirty metres apart run along both sides of the street, joining an existing network of cameras. These connect to a computer at the police station in Groningen. If the system hears certain sound patterns that correspond with aggression, it sends an alert to the police station, where the police can assess the situation by examining closed-circuit monitors: if necessary, officers are dispatched to the scene. This is no HAL, either, but the system is promising, because it does not pretend to be more intelligent than it is.

I thought the problem with the technology would be false positives—too many loud noises that the machine mistook for aggression. But in Groningen, at least, the problem has been just the opposite. "Groningen is the safest city in Holland," van Hengel said, ruefully. "There is virtually no crime. We don't have enough aggression to train the system properly." ♦

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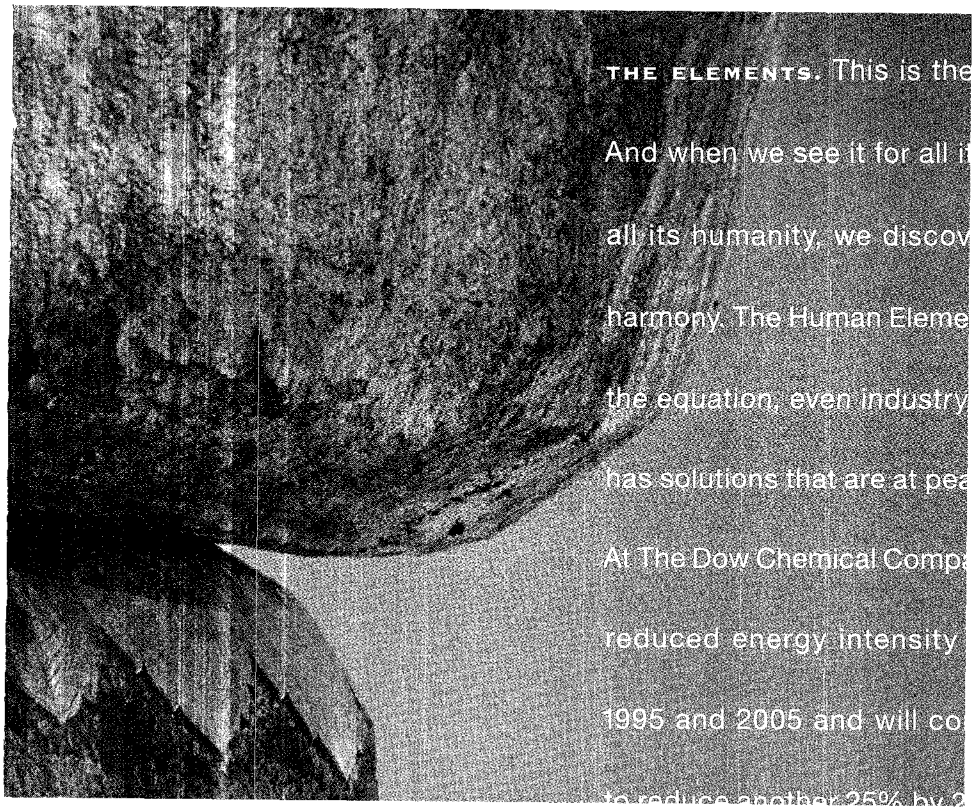

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A REPORTER AT LARGE

FIDEL'S HEIR

The influence of Hugo Chávez.

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

Venezuela's oil money has brought better living standards for the country's poorest citizens. It

MAGNUM

A few years ago, when Hugo Chávez, the President of Venezuela, said that he wanted a new jet to replace the nearly thirty-year-old Boeing bequeathed to him by his predecessor, his critics raised an outcry. But Chávez went ahead with his plans. His new plane, which cost sixty-five million dollars, is a gleaming white Airbus A-319, with a white leather interior, seating for sixty passengers, and a private compartment. The folding seat-back trays have gold-colored hinges, and there is plenty of legroom.

Chávez has spent more than a year altogether on trips abroad since taking office, in February, 1999, and so the jet is a kind of second home. His seat bears an embossed leather Presidential seal. Paintings of nineteenth-century Latin-American independence heroes hang on the walls, including a prominent one of Simón Bolívar, known as El Libertador. Bolívar led military campaigns to free large parts of South America from Spanish rule, and in 1819 he helped create a vast nation called Gran Colombia, which encompassed the present-day republics of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama. But political rivalries and internecine warfare frustrated Bolívar's dream of a United States of South America, and Gran Colombia fell apart soon after his death, in 1830.

Bolívar is Chávez's political muse; Chávez quotes and invokes him constantly, and is unabashed about his desire to resuscitate Bolívar's dream of a united Latin America. In his first year in office, Chávez held a successful referendum to draft a new constitution, which officially renamed the country the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. More remarkably, he has adopted Fidel Castro as his contemporary role model and socialism as his political ideal, and, a decade and a half after the collapse of the Soviet Union, is leading a left-wing revival across Latin America. Chávez's hemispheric ambitions have made him one of the most compelling, audacious, and polarizing figures in the world—one of a number of post-Cold War leaders trying to form regional power blocs. A generation ago, Castro sought to undermine United States authority by supporting armed guerrilla forces; Chávez has pursued that goal mainly by using money—thanks, in large measure, to U.S. oil purchases. Venezuela is the fifth-largest supplier of oil to the U.S., provid-

o given Chávez the means to buy influence with his neighbors, usually ing around a million barrels a day, and its proved oil reserves are among the world's largest.

One recent Sunday, I flew with Chávez to La Faja del Orinoco, an oil-rich belt of land in eastern Venezuela. In May, 2007, Chávez ordered the nationalization of pumping and refining facilities in La Faja owned by foreign oil companies. The move was one of a series of measures that Chávez had taken to increase Venezuela's share of oil revenues, including increases in royalty payments from 16.6 per cent to 33.3 per cent, and its ownership stake from around forty to at least sixty per cent. (As recently as 2004, these companies were paying royalties of one per cent of the oil's value.) Most of the oil companies, including Chevron and B.P., agreed to the terms; ConocoPhillips and ExxonMobil did not, and pulled out.

ExxonMobil had been pumping as many as a hundred and twenty thousand barrels a day out of La Faja. Seeking compensation, the company secured injunctions from judges in the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands that froze up to twelve billion dollars in overseas assets of Venezuela's state oil company, Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A., or P.D.V.S.A. Chávez, decrying "imperialist aggression," threatened to cut off all oil sales to the United States. Analysts estimate that if he should ever make good on that threat the price, which has already risen vertiginously, would spiral even farther upward. (A London court later overturned the British injunction, in what was seen as a major victory for Chávez, but the legal fight continues. ExxonMobil will not say publicly how much it asked for, except that the sum is "multiple billions of dollars.")

On the plane to La Faja were several of Chávez's ministers and aides, along with a dozen or so bodyguards and three Cuban doctors, who travel with him everywhere. Just after boarding, Chávez pushed through the curtains from his compartment to the main cabin and greeted everyone. He joked that the Cuban doctors must be guerrillas on an "internationalist mission." Halfway through the hour-long flight, I joined Chávez in his compartment. Chávez, who is about five feet seven, is a youthful-looking fifty-three, and has a thick neck and chest. He introduced me to General Gustavo Rangel, his Defense Minister, and René Vargas, Ecuador's Ambassador to Venezuela.

Chávez began our conversation by asking, "Tell us, why didn't Saddam put up more of a fight when the Yankees invaded?" Before I could reply, General Rangel said that the Americans had successfully degraded Iraq's air-defense system in the run-up to the war. Chávez looked at me for confirmation, and when I agreed he smiled, and said that, just in case the Americans were thinking of doing anything similar to Venezuela, he had bought an air-defense system from Belarus. (In the past four years, Venezuela has spent four billion dollars on foreign arms purchases, mostly from Russia.) The Belarusian system probably wasn't the most sophisticated in the world, Chávez said, but it was what Venezuela could get: "We do what we can to defend ourselves."

Chávez campaigned for the Presidency, in 1998, with promises to bring radical change, but, for a time after he won, it was unclear whether he could deliver much more than symbolism and oratory. When he took office, oil was at a mere ten dollars a barrel, and his first government budget was seven billion dollars; last year, as oil approached a hundred dollars a barrel (by last week, it was a hundred and thirty-six dollars), the budget rose to fifty-four billion. The oil money has allowed Chávez to triple spending on social programs. Even though many of these "missions," as they're known, have foundered or have proved inadequate, the volume of revenues has meant an improvement in living standards for the country's poorest citizens, who are, unsurprisingly, Chávez's strongest supporters. It has also given him the means to buy influence with his neighbors, usually at the expense of the United States.

Chávez's relationship with the United States, which was strained from the start, became openly hostile after a short-lived military coup, in 2002, that seemed to have the blessing of the Bush Administration. Chávez discontinued longstanding military ties and ended Venezuela's coöperation with the Drug Enforcement Administration, while Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, before he left office, compared Chávez to Adolf Hitler. In 2006, the State Department placed Venezuela on a list of nations that it described as "uncoöperative" in the war on terror.

Despite the harsh language, unofficial U.S. policy in the past few years has generally been to ignore Chávez, in order to avoid being drawn into a confrontation. This reflects a broader disengagement from the region during the Bush Administration. Since 2001, the United States has been distracted from Latin America by the war on terror and by Iraq, and that has given Chávez room to operate. Venezuela outspends the United States in foreign aid to the rest of Latin America by a factor of at least five. Last year, U.S. aid amounted to $1.6 billion, a third of which went to Colombia, mainly to fund Plan Colombia, a drug-eradication program administered by the U.S. security contractor DynCorp. Chávez, meanwhile, pledged $8.8 billion for the region. This included subsidized oil for Cuba, Nicaragua, and Bolivia; the purchase of public debt in Argentina; and development projects in Haiti. (Chávez has, in addition, provided discounted heating oil to poor Americans through Citgo, the Venezuelan state oil company's U.S. subsidiary.)

There is also evidence that Chávez has fostered a relationship with the Colombian Marxist guerrilla organization Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, or FARC. The FARC operates along Venezuela's border with Colombia and holds hundreds of hostages—civilians, soldiers, and politicians—in secret camps. Chávez has, at times, publicly distanced himself from the FARC, most recently last week, but the group's espousal of Bolivarian ideals, and its strategic position, appears to have tempted him into seeing the organization as a means, if only by proxy, of confronting the U.S.; Colombia is one of America's closest allies in the region.

The present in Latin America may be analogous to the nineteen-sixties, when the U.S. was mired in Vietnam and deeply unpopular internationally, and Fidel Castro and Che Guevara (another hero of Chávez's) saw an opportunity to foment guerrilla insurgencies elsewhere—"one, two, three, many Vietnams," as Che said—by which U.S. strength could be sapped.

Cris Arcos, who was, until recently, President Bush's Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security for International

Affairs, told me he feared that the moment had passed for the U.S. to do much to contain Chávez. "The problem with the war on terror is that the Pentagon can't engage anywhere else—it's tied down in Iraq and Afghanistan," Arcos said. "Our foreign policy is all about China and the war on terror, so where does that leave Latin America?"

In Latin America, Arcos said, "the political left has lost its fear of the gringos and the right has lost its respect for the U.S. Why? Ironically, because both expected the U.S. to smash the left, especially now that it is the sole superpower." He continued, "The U.S. predictably considers Chávez to be annoying and crude, and thinks that he behaves inappropriately for a head of state. His cavorting with Iranians and other pariahs is alarming to the U.S., yet it's not taken seriously by his South American neighbors." Their tolerance for Chávez, he said, was "evidence of the U.S.'s eroding influence in the region."

Bill Richardson, the governor of New Mexico, first met Chávez in 1999, when, as President Clinton's Energy Secretary, he represented the United States at Chávez's inauguration. (He brought him a baseball glove as a swearing-in gift.) Richardson told me, "I am concerned that, because of our policy to isolate Chávez, we may have created a vacuum in Latin America, where he already outvotes us on certain issues. I am not saying that this means we have to go along with him, but there may be ways we can establish a working relationship with him. Isolating him is not in our interest." Richardson said, "I question whether we would be wise to brand Chávez a state sponsor of terror"—a move that the Administration has considered—"because of our energy needs, and our energy relationship with Venezuela."

The old ExxonMobil station in La Faja was immaculate, all swept gravel and pristinely painted structures. Chávez, who has a regular live Sunday television show, "Aló Presidente," planned to broadcast from the facility that day.

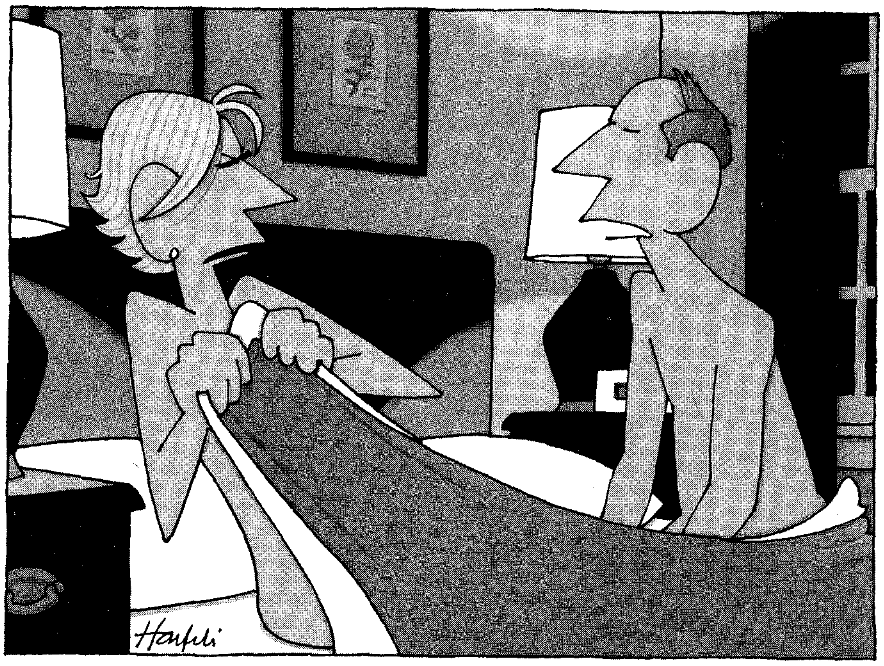
It was humid but pleasant. An advance team had set up several hundred folding chairs outside the refining station, and a plank floor had been laid down as a stage, with a desk for Chávez, furnished with maps, notepads, and books (including a Spanish edition of Joseph Stiglitz's "The Roaring Nineties"). Young aides in red T-shirts emblazoned with Chávez's image and the words "*Democracia en Revolución*" ("Democracy Within Revolution") and matching red baseball caps dispensed coffee and bottles of water. Chávez was dressed in a red guayabera and black jeans. His bodyguards and many of his ministers wore similar red guayaberas.

By the time Chávez sat down at the desk, he had been on the air for more than an hour, walking through the facility, followed by cameramen, with his daughter María Gabriela. She is a wide-faced young woman with a toothy smile. As they made their way, he explained what they were seeing, for the benefit of the television audience. Periodically, he stopped to hug or kiss her. She, her sister, Rosa Virginia, and a brother, Hugo Rafael, all in their twenties, are Chávez's children with his first wife, Nancy Colmenares, whom he divorced in the early nineties. Chávez also has a ten-year-old daughter, Rosinés, with his second wife, Marisabel Rodríguez. Rodríguez left him in 2002, and has since married a tennis instructor. Recently, she has begun speaking out publicly against Chávez, accusing him of being obsessed with power, and hinting that she would like to run for the Presidency herself.

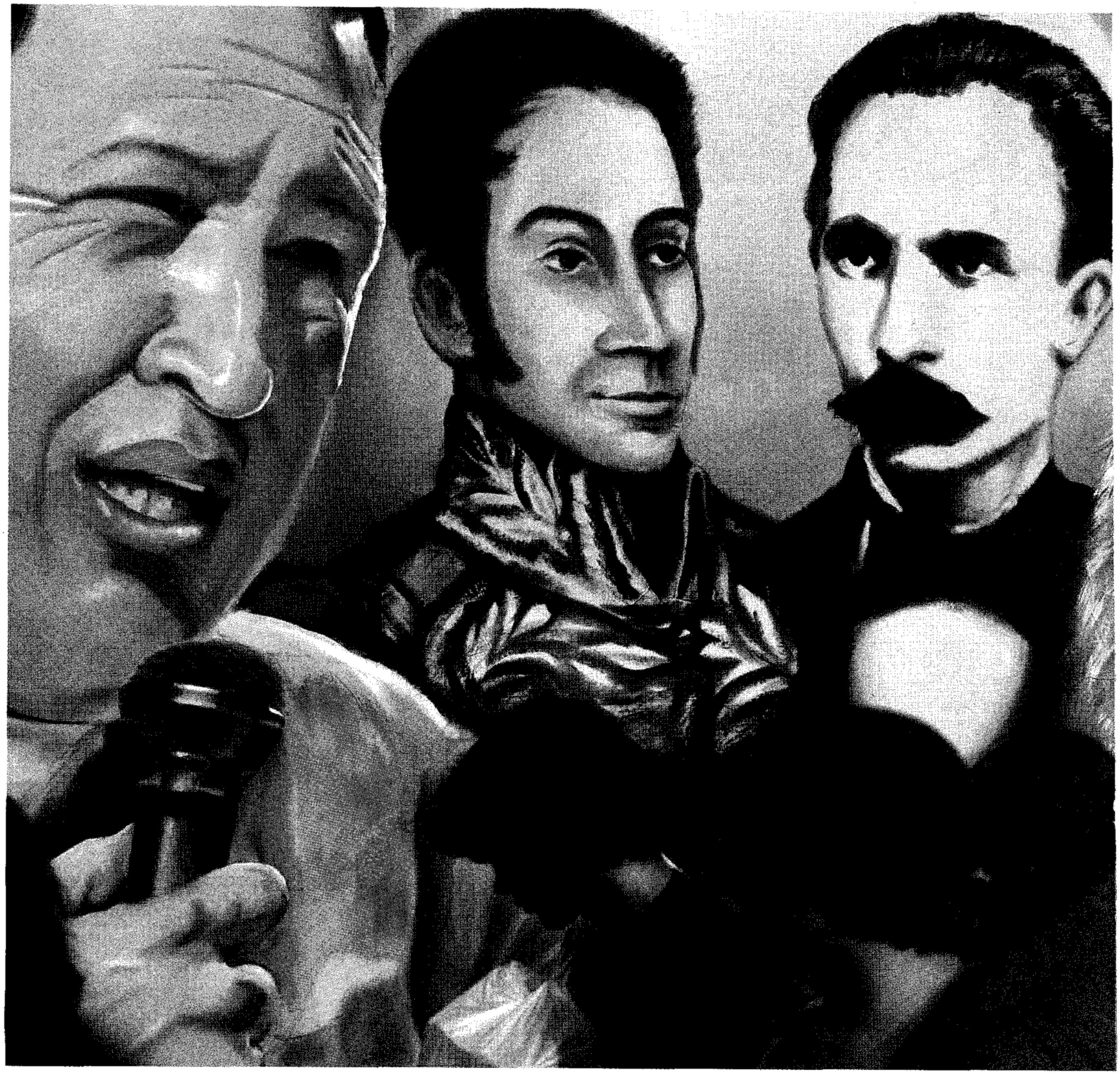
Sitting at the desk, Chávez began with a long pep talk for his supporters. When the camera cut away for a short, sharply critical film about ExxonMobil—it opened with a montage of images of Hitler, oil spills, and John D. Rockefeller—an aide held up a large white screen to shield Chávez while a young woman applied powder to his face. Another aide poured him espresso from a thermos, which he carried in a black leather briefcase.

Back on the air, Chávez spoke scornfully of the students known as *los chamos* ("the kids"), who, in demonstrations last year, rallied considerable public opposition to him. Some of the leaders of *los chamos* have expressed interest in running against Chávez's candidates in mayoral and gubernatorial elections scheduled for November; Chávez called out to those who might "throw themselves" into the race, "Go ahead, jump!" He then added, "Better put on parachutes."

Chávez has a gospel preacher's deftness with language and an actor's ability to evoke emotions. Within a single soliloquy, he comes up with rhymes, breaks into song, riffs on his own words, gets angry, cracks jokes, and loops back to where he started. His speeches can be highly entertaining, but it is sometimes difficult to know if he means what he says or has simply been carried away by his own oratory. A couple of years ago, at the United Nations General Assembly,



"I was going for inventive."



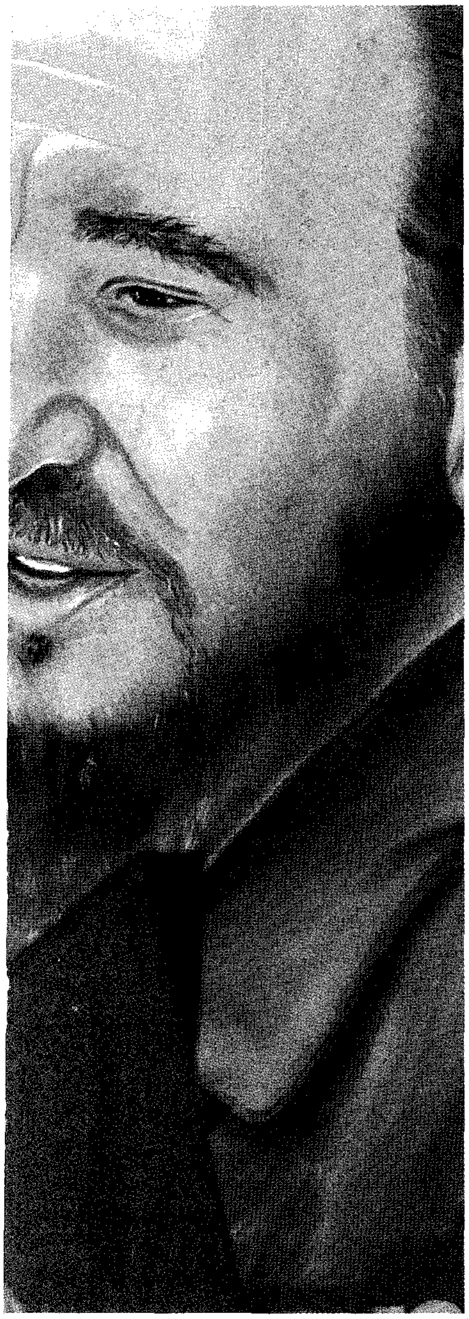
A mural in Caracas depicting Chávez, Simón Bolívar, José Martí, and Fidel Castro. Chávez unabashedly wants to resuscit

NOAH FRIEDMAN-RUDOVSKY/REDUX

he announced that he smelled "sulfur" at the lectern. The stench, he said, had been left by President Bush, who had spoken the day before, and was "the Devil." (Chávez has a repertoire of colorful labels for Bush, including "coward," "donkey," "drunkard," and "Mr. Danger.") At a summit meeting in Chile last November, Chávez repeatedly interrupted Spain's Prime Minister, until Juan Carlos, Spain's king, snapped, "*¿Porque no te callas?*"—"Why don't you shut up?" The King's rebuke became an instant YouTube sensation. In Spain alone, more than half a million people downloaded it as a cell-phone ring tone.

Chávez, sitting at the stage desk, drew a diagram on a large white card, and, holding it up to the "Aló Presidente" cameras, told viewers that he'd been thinking about a new "windfall profits" tax on oil companies. He called out to Rafael Ramírez, the president of P.D.V.S.A.—a tall, blue-eyed man who resembles Tim Robbins—and he promptly stood up and began taking notes, nodding furiously. This was not a rehearsed moment; to an unusual degree, "Aló Presidente" is Chávez's government in action, and it is a government that Chávez does not so much administer as perform live. A couple of Chávez's younger advisers told me that they frequently felt like supporting actors in Venezuela's own "Truman Show."

The show went on for five hours. At one point, Chávez spoke darkly about an assassination plot against him involving Colombian and American agents. He blamed Venezuela's private companies for shortages of food—milk, for instance, had become extremely scarce. Chávez informed his audience that, a few hours earlier, a cargo of powdered milk from Belarus had been unloaded at a Venezuelan port. He elicited a round of applause, as if the mere fact of the milk's arrival were a feat worth saluting, and



lívar's dream of a united Latin America.

pointed out a delegation of Belarusian officials in the audience. Chávez talks incessantly about building an alliance of nations that can challenge the United States; he has sought out relationships with Iran (and had earlier sought one with Saddam Hussein), China, Russia (Chávez has called Putin one of his *"buenos amigos"*), and, of course, Belarus.

The show cut away by satellite to a group of Belarusians and Venezuelans at the site of a joint seismic-mapping project. After a few minutes of pleasantries exchanged through an interpreter, Chávez remarked, "That translator, from the sound of things, is Cuban, for sure." He smiled. "Cuba all over the place!"

Then Chávez turned to the camera and, looking directly at it, asked, in English, "How are *you*, Fidel?"

Fidel Castro, who will turn eighty-two this summer, has been sick since July, 2006, when he vanished from view after returning from a trip to Argentina with Chávez. Despite rumors that he had cancer, it appears that Castro was suffering from diverticulitis, a severe intestinal disorder, which nearly killed him, and from which he has not entirely recovered. He has not appeared in public since, but photographs and video footage have offered glimpses of a diminished man. In all this time, Chávez has been one of the few people outside Castro's immediate family who are allowed to see him. He has taken it upon himself to visit the Old Man regularly and to cheer him up.

"For me, Fidel is like a father. Like a beacon. Fidel is, I believe, irreplaceable," Chávez told me. "He is a giant of the twentieth century, and, just as he entered its history, he has also entered into that of the twenty-first. And there he is, even now, doing everything he can to keep on fighting what he calls the battle of ideas, until his last breath."

The deep friendship between Chávez and Castro began well before Chávez took office. In 1979, when Chávez was a young lieutenant in the Venezuelan Army, he and other junior officers began talking about a revolution. Their plans became more serious in 1989, after the Caracazo, a three-day riot that began when the government of Carlos Andrés Pérez implemented International Monetary Fund reforms, resulting in a spike in the cost of gasoline and public transportation; the Army was called into the streets, and hundreds of civilians were shot dead. Three years later, in 1992, Chávez, then a lieutenant colonel, led a military rebellion. But he surrendered when it became clear that his men were outnumbered, and that continuing would only mean further bloodshed. (At least twenty people died.) Allowed to appear on television, he said that the coup was over, but only *"por ahora"*—for now. The bombast, and the implicit threat of Chávez's words, captivated Venezuelans, and launched his political career.

Chávez was imprisoned, along with his co-conspirators. They were released two years later, in 1994, after Pérez was impeached for corruption, and the criminal charges against them were dismissed. One of the first things Chávez did was go to Havana and meet Fidel Castro. Castro received him warmly, and treated him like a head of state. When, five years later, Chávez came to power, he returned to Havana and paid his respects to Castro.

Chávez told me that while he was in jail he had read an interview with Castro that impressed him deeply. At the time, the Cuban economy had all but collapsed, owing to the abrupt end of Soviet subsidies. "Fidel said, 'There will be a new wave, sooner or later. The people of Latin America will awaken and there will be a new wave, and it will have to be seen,' " Chávez said. "Now, as for the new wave, it's here"—he slapped the arm of his chair—"and if someone can't see it, it's because he's blind, and if he can't feel it, it's because he's dead."

Since 2001, Cuba has received shipments of subsidized Venezuelan oil, estimated to be worth $2.5 billion a year, in exchange for the services of thousands of Cuban teachers, sports instructors, and doctors, who work in Venezuela's slums and rural areas. Thousands of Venezuelans are studying in Cuba, and more than a hundred thousand Venezuelans with eye problems have been sent to Cuba for specialized medical treatment. In 2004, Chávez and Castro signed a sweeping trade deal that eliminated tariffs between their countries, and simultaneously committed themselves to Chávez's Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, or ALBA, which means "dawn" in Spanish. ALBA is intended to counter the "neoliberal" trading bloc envisaged under the U.S.-sponsored Free Trade Area of the Americas. (Bolivia, Nicaragua, and the small Caribbean island nation of Dominica have since joined ALBA.) Chávez has become Cuba's primary benefactor while positioning himself as the inheritor of Fidel's mantle.

In February, Castro released a letter saying that he was giving up his post as Cuba's President. "Fidel hasn't resigned from anything," Chávez, loyally, told reporters. "He's just stepped aside for others." (Fidel's younger brother Raúl replaced him as President.) Chávez promised to “continue fighting” at Fidel’s side.

Teodoro Petkoff, who ran against Chávez in the 2006 Presidential election campaign and is one of his leading critics on the center-left, told me that Castro had been “a moderating influence” on Chávez—a source for level-headed and pragmatic consultation for the younger man. He thought that Castro’s departure from active politics had, in that sense, hurt Chávez. “Chávez doesn’t have anyone to talk to, and there’s no one who can argue with him; the people around him are all mediocre personalities,” he told me. “The relationship with Fidel is key, because Chávez has a kind of adolescent devotion to him.”

I was reminded of something that Román Ortiz, a security-affairs analyst with a Bogotá think tank, told me: “Chávez and his plans don’t fit into the minds of those who read and believed in Fukuyama and thought we were all going to be liberals. They don’t really grasp that he has a political project, one that shares certain elements with the FARC, which is to rebuild Gran Colombia.” Ortiz added, “He will have to be contained in order for war to be avoided. Chávez is more dangerous and unpredictable than Fidel Castro. In this scenario, we are going to miss Castro.”

The nature of Chávez’s relationship with the FARC, which has been fighting to overthrow the Colombian government for more than forty years, is one of the most controversial questions about him. The FARC occupies large areas of the remote jungle of southern and eastern Colombia and finances itself by taxing illicit coca farmers and cocaine processors and traffickers. Chávez’s perceived support of the guerrillas has alienated even some of his natural allies and, since last year, has been the focus of a dispute between him and his Colombian counterpart, Álvaro Uribe, that has taken on increasingly bizarre dimensions.

Last August, Uribe asked for Chávez’s help in negotiating with the FARC for the release of hostages, some of whom have been held for as long as a decade. Chávez agreed. Then, in late November, Uribe, after learning that Chávez had spoken with the commander of the Colombian Army without first asking his permission, abruptly cut Chávez out. Chávez responded, in one tirade after another, by calling Uribe a “mafia boss,” a “coward,” and a “liar.”

Gahan Wilson

“Thanks again, kid!”

Uribe does have a problematic background. In a 1991 U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency document, he is described as being a “close personal friend of Pablo Escobar,” the late drug lord. As a regional governor, Uribe helped establish a civilian vigilante organization, CONVIVIR, that metamorphosed into an armed paramilitary network. Colombia’s right-wing paramilitary forces have fought a vicious war against the country’s leftist guerrillas and their sympathizers, killing thousands of civilians. And, like the FARC, they became involved in the drug trade. In the complex web of relationships that characterize Colombian society, however, few politicians can claim never to have had a relationship with a *narcotraficante*, a guerrilla commander, or a paramilitary warlord. During the past five years, thousands of paramilitaries have given up their weapons in a demobilization deal that has been criticized by human-rights groups as amounting to amnesty, but Uribe has been unwilling to broker a similar deal with the FARC. In the early nineteen-nineties, his father was killed during an attempt by the FARC to kidnap him.

In his attacks on Uribe, Chávez also claimed that the United States was using Colombia as a staging ground to plot his overthrow and assassination. In response, a senior U.S. diplomat in Caracas told me, “The things President Chávez accuses the United States of are just implausible. The United States has three citizens in the FARC’s hands in Colombia. We, in fact, supported President Chávez’s initial role as an arbitrator.”

Chávez continued to negotiate with the FARC on his own, and, in mid-January, he secured the release of two women. One of them, Clara Rojas, had been the campaign manager for Ingrid Betancourt, who was kidnapped in 2002 while running for President, and is the best known of the hostages. The episode had all the melodrama of a telenovela, as Rojas was reunited with her three-year-old son, Emmanuel, to whom she had given birth in the jungle, and whose father was a FARC guerrilla. Her captors had taken Emmanuel from her, and he had ended up in an orphanage. The women told of hostages being held in inhumane conditions—some were kept chained to trees. Chávez, however, chose that moment to urge Colombia to recognize the FARC as a “belligerent party,” which would give it diplomatic legitimacy, and to call on foreign governments to stop listing it as a terrorist organization. Chávez's statements left him isolated. In February, some four million Colombians demonstrated to repudiate the FARC; many were also critical of Chávez.

Gustavo Petro is an outspoken leftist Colombian senator who is well known for his opposition to Uribe, but last year he publicly condemned the FARC for its drug trafficking and its human-rights abuses. He attributed Chávez's position to naïveté. "The FARC has latched on to Chávez and his good will because it is in need of political varnish," he told me. "It behaves like an occupation force, and has abandoned attempts to win over a base of support among the civilians. It actually kills more indigenous Colombians than any other armed group in the country today. Chávez doesn't accept any of this. He is a romantic. If he sees people he thinks are 'revolutionaries,' Chávez salutes them and says, 'At your service!' "

In official circles in Caracas, I found a near-total disconnect with the mood in Colombia. Venezuela's Foreign Minister, Nicolás Maduro, dismissed the public's support for Uribe as the product of "a media dictatorship, with the means of communication in the hands of the most rancid, racist, retrograde oligarchy on the continent."

A few hours after I spoke to Maduro, I was summoned to meet Venezuela's reclusive Interior Minister, Ramón Rodríguez Chacín, a former naval captain. He was a participant in Chávez's abortive coup, and, like him, served two years in prison. More recently, Rodríguez Chacín has been Chávez's personal emissary to the FARC. It was widely noted in Colombia that, in television coverage of a recent hostage release, he hugged the guerrillas and urged them to "keep up the struggle."

I met Rodríguez Chacín at night in a remote part of Fuerte Tiuna, the Venezuelan Army's headquarters, in the mountains on the outskirts of Caracas. A small man in jeans and a red windbreaker, with a stubbly shaved head, he was waiting in a large, bunkerlike room. There were piles of military gear, a desk with half a dozen telephones on it, an exercise bike, and a cot. On a low table I saw the "Selected Works of V. I. Lenin" and "The Diary of a Snail," by Günter Grass.

We went outside to talk. The lights of the city appeared far below us like stars in an upside-down sky. Periodically, bursts of automatic gunfire could be heard. Rodríguez Chacín said that a military firing range was situated on the side of the mountain. "Sometimes they miss, so it's unwise to go too near the edge when they're shooting."

He told me that he was negotiating the release of four more Colombian hostages—members of parliament who had been kidnapped six years earlier. The FARC was to bring them to a rendezvous point in the jungle; he alone would be informed of the exact location, he said. He was just waiting for the word. (The hostages were in fact released, four days later.) Rodríguez Chacín said that the FARC wanted peace, "but a different kind of peace from what Colombia's oligarchy has in mind." Colombia, he said, was the United States' "last bastion, practically the last secure beachhead it has in Latin America. So the real enemy, behind this whole circumstance, even more so than the Colombian oligarchy, is the Empire." (In Bolivarian Venezuela, "the Empire" is the United States.)

At the entrance to a grimy traffic tunnel in downtown Caracas stands a statue of Simón Bolívar. One day, I saw a handwritten sign there, reminiscent of the revelatory messages on placards sometimes seen in front of the White House. It carried an admonition, in Spanish, saying, "Barack Obama will be the Beast, and the last President of the United States."

The apocalyptic message was somehow fitting. Caracas is, in many respects, a failed city, and it looks and feels like a place that has spun out of control. The crime rate is shockingly high; there were an estimated five hundred and fifty murders in the first three months of this year. Indigents live openly in the public parks and along the embankments of the city's sewage trough of a river, the Guaire. Here and there are skyscrapers built in the boom years of the sixties and seventies, their concrete carcasses discolored and crumbling. Hundreds of thousands of shanties scar the surrounding green mountains. Garbage lies uncollected, and the streets are choked with traffic—and, since Venezuela is flush with oil money, there are brand-new cars everywhere. Four hundred and fifty thousand new vehicles were sold last year. Wealthy Venezuelans, meanwhile, live in gated communities and secure apartment buildings on hilltops with panoramic views over Caracas; a nouveau-riche class has emerged from the official ranks and is known, disparagingly, as the *boliburguesia*, for Bolivarian bourgeoisie.

Five years ago, Chávez took direct control of the state oil company, P.D.V.S.A., after sitting out a two-month strike by its union. He fired more than eighteen thousand employees, replacing many of them with his supporters. Since then, he has used P.D.V.S.A.'s revenues to fund his most revolutionary schemes, which include the so-called missions to Venezuela's poor. Rafael Ramírez, the P.D.V.S.A. chief, told me that Chávez intended to use P.D.V.S.A. as the vehicle for transforming Venezuela from an "oil sultanate to a productive society within a socialist framework." Like a state within a state, the oil company has begun to replicate or supersede many of the functions of the national government. New P.D.V.S.A. branches oversee everything from agriculture to shipping, construction, and food distribution. "The plan is to make P.D.V.S.A. like Gazprom," Ramírez told me, referring to the Russian energy giant, "but with a social role."

Venezuela has a complex and volatile economy, with rampant corruption and high rates of unemployment and oil-fuelled inflation. A prominent Venezuelan economist, Orlando Ochoa, blamed Chávez's policies and the inefficiency of his government for many of these problems. He described the situation to me as a "perfect economic storm." He said, "No price of oil can forestall the rate of inflation and its social consequences." But Ochoa acknowledged that, as long as oil prices remained high, the government could probably stave off collapse indefinitely.

Chávez's current term ends in 2013. Last year, he held a referendum to amend the constitution and remove provisions that would prevent him from running for a third term. He let it be known that he would like to stay in power until 2050, when he would be ninety-six years old. The referendum was narrowly defeated; it was his first loss at the polls since becoming President, and it reinvigorated the political opposition.

Petkoff, who campaigned against

Chávez in 2006, told me, "Chávez is a charismatic leader, and he understood that the result of the referendum meant that his popularity with the people had been somewhat eroded. He needed to find a way to reconnect more directly with the people, and so he has turned everything into a kind of personal 'They're coming for me' drama." Petkoff added, "Chávez is bipolar, really. One side of his brain is Girondin, and the other is Jacobin. He is prudent, and he is also radical."

Petkoff's wife, a psychologist, who was listening to us, demurred: "He's a psychopath, in my opinion."

Petkoff replied, "Yes, maybe, but a psychopath with a mission."

José Vicente Rangel, who served as Chávez's Vice-President from 2002 until 2007, said he thought that Chávez's "infatuation" with foreign affairs and his neglect of Venezuela's domestic problems had contributed to the referendum's defeat. "Public insecurity is the scourge of Venezuelans, but Chávez never comprehended it," Rangel said. "He sees the crime rate as a product of poverty, a social issue, and this is because he believes in a mythology of poverty in which all the poor are good, and it just isn't that way; the poor are criminals, too." Rangel said that the rebuke to his government was something Chávez took seriously—"He's in a period of deep reflection." The loss had shattered Chávez's "myth of invincibility," Rangel said, "and that has damaged us."

A FRAME

Fussily ornate and merely decorative,
Wreaths of fruited branchlets and fluttering ribbons
Echoing the scrolled plasterwork
On moldings around the mirrored
Parlors where a patron
Could straighten his collar,
Reliefs embellished with glass beads
To mimic his beloved's brooch,
Rosettes cast in pairs and affixed with foil and wax,
Then coated with gesso and gilded to seem carved,

Or cross-hatched textures scratched onto the surfaces
Of curling leaves and hammered for the fine matting
Of metal with tiny pocked points,
The crinkled foil of gold pressed down
Onto the moistened bole
For a burnished veneer
That aligns the soft candlelight
On the apostle's face with what
Shines more severely from the Savior's fingertip,
Is not the sort of frame I prefer to enclose

In the early hours of March 1st, two days after the release of the four parliamentarian hostages, Colombian troops crossed into Ecuadoran territory and destroyed a FARC camp there. The FARC's second-in-command, Raúl Reyes, was killed, along with twenty-four others. Uribe telephoned Ecuador's President, Rafael Correa, to apologize for the incursion, but said that it had been done in self-defense—FARC fighters had fired on Colombian troops from the Ecuadoran side of the border.

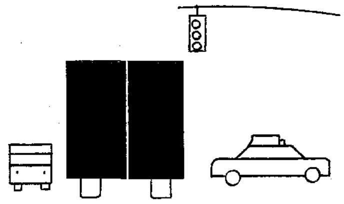
On the next day's "Aló Presidente," which was broadcast from a plaza in Caracas, Chávez referred angrily to the "cowardly murder" of Reyes, whom he called a "good revolutionary," and he said that the incident could be "the start of a war in South America." Looking straight into the cameras, he added, "Try that here, President Uribe, and I will send you some Sukhois!" (Venezuela recently bought twenty-four Sukhoi fighter jets from Russia.)

Then Chávez turned to his Defense Minister, General Rangel, who was in the audience. Rangel stood up and snapped to attention. "Mr. Defense Minister, send ten battalions to the border with Colombia immediately," Chávez said. "Tank battalions."

In ordering the movement of troops on live TV, Chávez reinforced the unconventional aspect of his Presidency, in which statecraft is also a reality show. He then told viewers that he was closing the Venezuelan Embassy in Bogotá.

The next day, the chief of Colombia's national police, General Oscar Naranjo, announced that three laptops and several hard drives had been seized during the raid on the FARC camp. According to General Naranjo, e-mail exchanges found on Reyes's computer indicated that Chávez had offered the FARC three hundred million dollars; one e-mail message, allegedly from a FARC official, suggested that Rodríguez Chacín had asked the FARC to help train Venezuelans in "guerrilla warfare." (There were also murky references to an attempt by the FARC to buy uranium for a "dirty bomb," although these seemed less credible.)

Chávez dismissed the e-mails as fabrications. Uribe said that he intended to seek an indictment against Chávez before the International Criminal Court, for what he called "the patronage and financing of genocidists." Uribe's approval ratings soared to eighty-four per cent, while Chávez was viewed unfavorably by ninety per cent of Colombians.



Suddenly, there was talk of regional war. Television broadcasts showed Venezuelan tanks moving toward Colombia's borders; trade between the two countries ground to a halt, and diplomats were expelled. One Latin-American diplomat told me he feared that the situation could easily escalate into a larger armed conflict. "Chávez is using this incident to divert public attention from his internal problems," he said. "And I think he is also trying to

What I should figure on as an allegory
Of someone's sense of what he puts between himself
And the world. I prefer the frame
Whose entablature seems to shield
What it displays, withhold
What has been given it
To help explain the mysteries
Of the child sent to redeem us.
From architrave to plinth, balusters upholding
What the crested lunette oversees, the rigid

Vocabulary of antiquity admits
No distractions, nothing to lead the eye away
From the perfected cityscape
And room, where a sad pale woman
Under a stone cherub
The color of the clouds
Holds something that she knows will die.
A friend sits beside her, peeling
An apple. In the distance, three men on horseback
Look up at her window, the darkness in a frame.

—*J. D. McClatchy*

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demonstrate that he is the leader of the region's popular forces. It is a very risky calculation."

A few days after Chávez ordered his tanks to the Colombian border, I interviewed him at Miraflores, the Presidential palace. We sat under a large portrait of Simón Bolívar. Chávez was wearing black jeans, a green military jacket, and a red T-shirt. The next day, he was to fly to Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic, where some twenty Latin-American leaders were gathering for a summit, which would address the crisis. He intended to confront Uribe there.

I asked Chávez if his dispute with Colombia was getting out of hand. He replied, "If you look at the situation clearly, the reality is that you have an anti-imperialist revolutionary country here and, over there, a counterrevolutionary, pro-imperialist country. It's an explosive contradiction." Over the years, he said, he had mostly managed to maintain good relations with Uribe. He mentioned a dispute involving a FARC emissary kidnapped in Caracas at the direction of Colombian agents. On that occasion, Chávez had been about to break off diplomatic relations when Uribe asked Fidel Castro to intercede. "Fidel called me, and so we found a solution," Chávez said.

"All this garbage is going to come back and fall on Uribe himself," he said. "First of all, just to clarify, the mobilization of troops on the border, that's all defensive—eminently defensive. Because we are faced with a government, the Colombian government, that has publicly assumed the Bush doctrine—preventive war, preëmptive attack."

He expressed understanding for the FARC. When, during a ceasefire in the mid-eighties, the FARC established a political party, thousands of its members were murdered, Chávez said. He said that he couldn't "dismiss the possibility that a group of guerrillas can cross the border—ours with Colombia is more than two thousand kilometres long—and install themselves, as occurred with Ecuador, here." He went on, "Anyone would understand that I was obliged to reinforce the border. I had to warn Uribe that he should not dare to do here in Venezuela what he did in Ecuador."

As for Uribe's accusations and his threat to bring him before the International Criminal Court, "I laugh at them—they are risible." Uribe was the one who should be investigated for genocide, Chávez said. "There are documents detailing the massacres by the paramilitaries in Colombia. It's a horrible thing. They burn people, they cut them into pieces—into pieces! And Uribe supported that." He added, "Uribe says I will be accused? Well, to paraphrase Fidel, who once said that history will absolve him, history has already condemned Álvaro Uribe."

I asked Chávez if he believed that a confrontation with the United States was inevitable.

"Look, once, when I was a boy, I nearly drowned in a river," Chávez said. "The current took me. Friends saved me when I was swept into a rock. Imagine if I had not been saved, and I had drowned at fifteen. This would have happened anyway. . . . If the oligarchies of this continent, directed by the United States and that group of extreme right-wing fascists with their imperial strategies of war who are in the White House, try to stop this revolution, Latin America will go up in flames."

Chávez said that it was not his intention, as some said, "to be the leader of a continental revolution. Nor do we plan to export the Bolivarian revolution. It is a process that is happening—it is the people who are doing it. . . . Now, does this project necessarily have to confront the United States?" He paused. "I would say yes—not the United States as such but the imperial line of the United States. Confrontation is inevitable."

Chávez's jet took off for the Dominican Republic the next afternoon—"*Hola, guerrilleros!*" he called out to his Cuban doctors as we boarded. Maduro, the Foreign Minister, said, smiling, "Let's go confront the Empire."

The summit began the next morning, in a convention center set among the resort hotels and casinos on Santo Domingo's seafront. At Chávez's suggestion, I was given a lapel pin identifying me as a member of the Venezuelan delegation so that I could get into the Presidents' session, which was closed to the press. President Uribe, a pale, small, trim-looking man, was the first head of state to enter the hall, followed by Chávez and Daniel Ortega, Nicaragua's President. Ortega wore a suède jacket and jeans; all the other leaders, including Chávez, wore suits. (Ortega, the former Sandinista leader, was reëlected President last year, in spite of an unending series of scandals, and has begun to restore his image, thanks in part to Chávez's financial and political largesse.)

Chávez and Uribe ignored one another.

The Dominican President, Leonel Fernández, opened the meeting and gave Rafael Correa, of Ecuador, the floor. "The government of Colombia *bombed* my country," Correa began. Ecuador, he said, was prepared to pursue its grievances to their "final consequences." Looking at Uribe, Correa said, "Your insolence offends us even more than your murderous bombs."

Chávez and the rest of the Venezuelan delegation gave Correa a standing ovation.

Uribe spoke next. He described Raúl Reyes, the FARC leader killed in the raid, as "one of the most frightening terrorists in the history of humanity." (A Chávez adviser next to me rolled his eyes.) He conceded that his troops had bombed the camp in Ecuador—but said that the bombs had been launched from Colombian territory. As for the guerrillas who were killed, "they weren't there preparing for Easter festivities."

At one point, Daniel Ortega got up, walked behind Correa, and stared hard at Uribe, looking like a man spoiling for a fight. When Uribe suggested that he sit down, Ortega said, "I am not your son! Who do you think you are?" After a while, he sauntered back to his seat.

Following Uribe's remarks, Correa said that Uribe would bomb the Dominican Republic if he suspected that it harbored another Raúl Reyes.

"Don't inflict on me the cynicism of those who are nostalgic for Communism," Uribe interrupted.

Correa, continuing, raised his arms. "*These* hands are clean and free of blood."

The session seemed close to breaking down. Then Chávez spoke. He began by telling stories, goading the others and drawing them in. In the nineties, he said, he had been accused of giving arms to Bolivia's President, Evo Morales, who was then a *cocalero* activist and a congressman, and to another indigenous Bolivian leader, Felipe Quispe. Chávez said to Morales, "Evo—I think Quispe's even more radical than you." Morales smiled modestly.

Chávez said he found ironic the accusation that he was providing three hundred million dollars to the FARC, since he had recently financed a three-hundred-million-dollar gas pipeline for Colombia—he and Uribe had attended the groundbreaking together. Chávez looked across at Cristina Kirchner, the President of Argentina, whose populist, left-of-center government is supportive of his. "Witness the infamy that was invented that I had sent suitcases full of dollars to Cristina." (Last August, a Venezuelan-American businessman travelling to Buenos Aires was found to be carrying eight hundred thousand dollars in undeclared cash in his suitcase. Although Chávez has denied it, the widespread assumption is that he was secretly financing Kirchner's Presidential campaign.) "And now it's suitcases in the jungle!"

By now, many of the leaders were laughing. Chávez had created an atmosphere of entente cordiale, and momentarily blunted Uribe's charges against him. "I could have sent plenty of rifles to the FARC," Chávez said. "I could have sent them plenty of dollars—I will not do it, ever."

Chávez then had a surprise: the FARC, he said, had just informed him that it was prepared to release six more hostages. Uribe spoke in urgent whispers with his aides. Chávez asked President Fernández if protocol could be broken to allow the mother of Ingrid Betancourt to come into the hall. After some commotion, Betancourt's mother, Yolanda Pulecio, an elegant woman in her late sixties (and a former Miss Colombia), entered. With her was Piedad Córdoba, a flamboyant left-wing Colombian senator who has worked with Chávez in negotiations with the FARC, and who was wearing a white turban. Uribe looked furious; Chávez was showing that he, not Uribe, was the one who could save the hostages' lives.

By now, some eight hours had gone by, and waiters brought the leaders plates of food while they talked. Finally, an agreement was worked out, as part of which Uribe promised, reluctantly, not to conduct new cross-border raids. Fernández asked Uribe and Correa to embrace. After some hesitation, they shook hands. Chávez walked up to Uribe and greeted him, too, and the crisis seemed to be at an end. Then, moments later, Correa began berating Uribe, who bristled. The other leaders in the room looked alarmed. Chávez swiftly spoke in mollifying tones to Uribe, who relaxed.

I walked out with Piedad Córdoba and Yolanda Pulecio. Córdoba was gleeful. She said that she and Chávez and Cristina Kirchner had planned everything in detail—the revelation about the new hostages, and Pulecio's dramatic appearance.

Chávez had shown himself capable of sparking a regional confrontation and then, by defusing it, appearing as the peacemaker. It was similar to the moment in 1992 when he called off his coup attempt. Uribe understood that he had been temporarily outmaneuvered, and had responded to Chávez's gesture. Both leaders, to an extent, could declare victory, although it was clear that this was just a skirmish in an ongoing conflict.

We were boarding the flight that was to take us back to Caracas when Chávez announced that he had changed his mind: the plane was going to Cuba instead. A wave of elation swept through the delegation. When we arrived in Havana, it was nearly midnight. Raúl Castro, wearing a military uniform, a brimmed hat, and large glasses, which gave him an owlish appearance, was waiting to greet Chávez as he got off the plane. Chávez was exuberant, and called me over to introduce me to Raúl, who looked me up and down with a cautious smile and shook my hand. As the rest of the delegation headed to a state-run hotel, Chávez disappeared with Raúl.

The next day, Raúl saw Chávez off at the airport. As we taxied away, Chávez came to the rear of the plane. He was beaming. He had spent three hours with Fidel, who was "just fine." He added, "Fidel asked me to say hello to all of you for him!"

Afterward, a senior Latin-American diplomat told me he learned that Chávez had lowered the tension with Uribe at the summit "because Fidel advised him to."

In mid-May, the Interpol team investigating the captured FARC laptops announced that the hard drives had not been tampered with since their discovery. The investigators cautioned that they did not verify the authorship or the accuracy of the e-mails, but the report was damning. Chávez responded by deriding the investigators, calling Interpol's secretary general, an American, an "international vagabond."

Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Shannon said that he was "surprised" at Chávez's flippant reaction. Two days after the release of the report, on May 17th, a U.S. Navy jet strayed into Venezuelan airspace, owing to what the Pentagon said was a navigation error. Defense Minister Rangel called the incident a "provocation."

A series of embarrassments and set-

backs for Chávez followed. A decree law, intended to bolster the country's intelligence in case of "imperialist attacks," passed on May 28th and came under immediate and widespread criticism; many Venezuelans feared that it would require them to inform on one another. Ten days later, on June 7th, the Colombian government announced the arrest of a Venezuelan officer whom they accused of smuggling forty thousand AK-47 bullets to the FARC. Chávez's government said that it was investigating. Adding to the sense of disarray, the FARC was forced to confirm reports that its legendary leader, Manuel Marulanda, had died of a heart attack.

Chávez seemed to realize that he had gone too far. The day of the smuggling arrest, he announced that he would suspend the new intelligence law, saying, "There is no dictatorship here." Then, on his June 8th "Aló Presidente" broadcast, he unexpectedly called on the FARC to give up its armed struggle and let its hostages go, saying that guerrillas did not have a place in today's world. Chávez appeared—for now—to be withdrawing from the battlefield he had helped to create, pragmatically cutting his losses. Above all, he had shown the strength of his instincts as a survivor.

Whether his call to the FARC was more than a tactical ploy remains to be seen. "Those were very useful words," Assistant Secretary Shannon said at a talk in Miami. "That does not mean we aren't aware of what is happening, and the kind of relationship that has been built over time between some members of the Venezuelan government and the FARC." The question is, Shannon said, will the Venezuelan government "use that relationship in an effort to get the FARC to come in out of the cold and end a four-decade conflict? Or will it continue to conspire against a democratic neighbor? . . . That, I think, is what everybody in the region is waiting for: how Venezuela will define itself."

Bill Richardson said that, in April, he had travelled to Caracas to speak to Chávez on behalf of the families of three American defense contractors being held by the FARC. Chávez had been effusive and friendly—Richardson is Mexican-American, and they spoke for an hour and a half in Spanish. He told Richardson that he did not comprehend the Bush Administration's hostility toward him: "He told me he didn't like being demonized." When Richardson asked him if he would get in touch with the FARC about the American contractors, Chávez said, "*Sí, te ayudo*"—"Yes, I will help you." Richardson said, "We need to establish some lines of communication with him, and this—coöperation on the hostage negotiations—is a possible way to start. I think we should keep a stable relationship with Venezuela; it's in our interest to do so."

On June 7th, Chávez had also said, "Whoever is the next President of the United States, I'd like to start preparing the way to start working together." When I asked Ana Navarro, an adviser to Senator John McCain, the presumptive Republican nominee, about the offer, she said, "Senator McCain thinks that Chávez is a charlatan and a thug. The Senator doesn't trust Chávez, and does not think it worth getting into a back-and-forth with him." Last year, Senator Barack Obama was asked in a debate if he would be willing to meet with leaders who are hostile to the United States—Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Chávez, and Castro—"without precondition." Obama answered that he would, prompting Senators McCain and Hillary Clinton to suggest that he was naïve. Obama subsequently said that high on his agenda in any talks with Chávez would be addressing "the fomentation of anti-American sentiment in Latin America," and "his support of the FARC in Colombia," which, he said, was "not acceptable."

I asked Richardson if he had carried a message to Chávez on behalf of Senator Obama, whose candidacy he endorsed after dropping out of the Presidential race himself. Richardson said that he hadn't, but that the thought had seemed to occur to Chávez, too. "He said that he had noticed my endorsement. And he said, 'We could use better treatment from the United States.' But I don't think he sees me as a representative of Obama, but as a fellow Latin-American," Richardson said. "His message to me was 'Take me seriously, and treat me better.'" ♦

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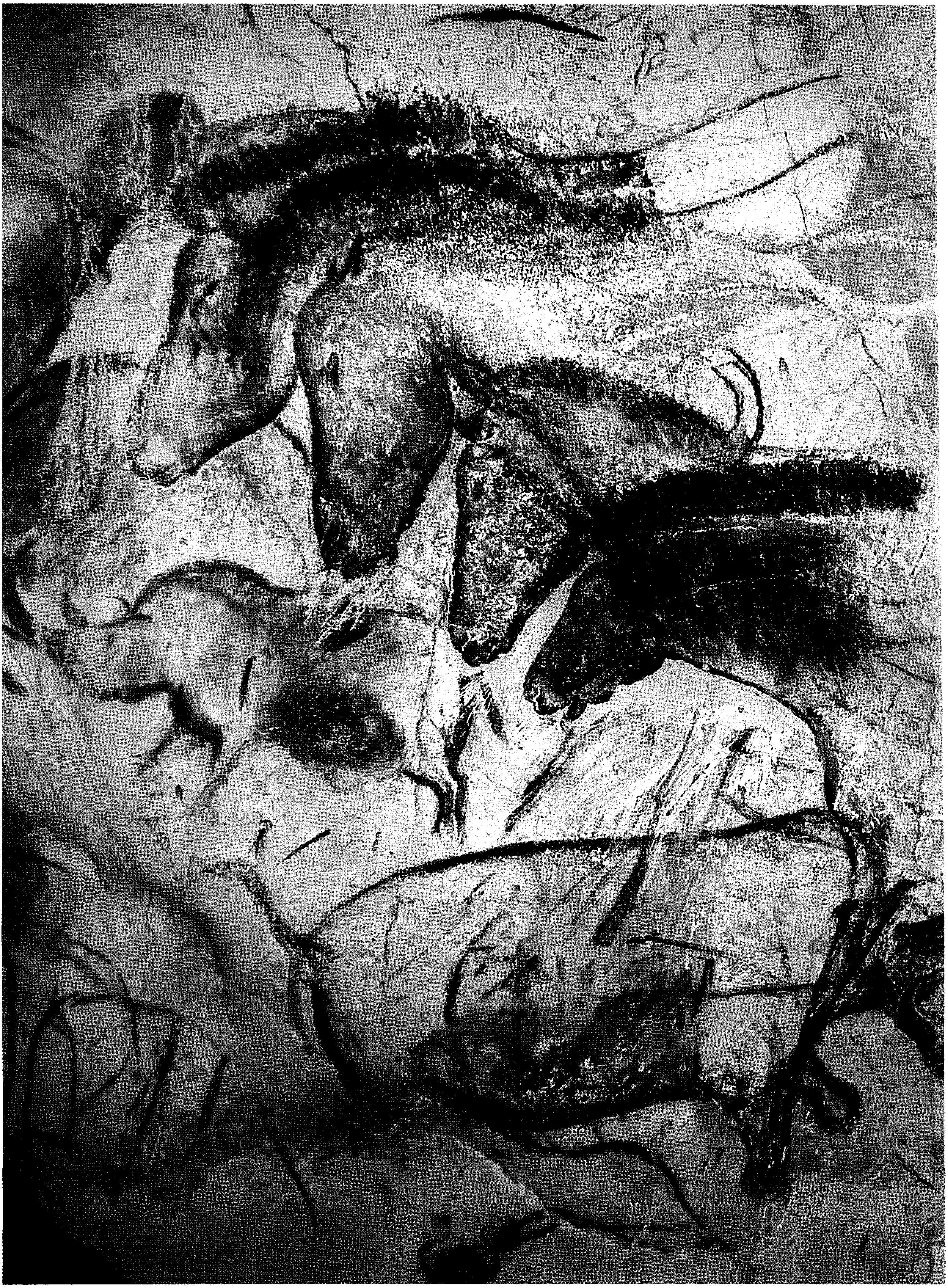
More photographs of Hugo Chávez.



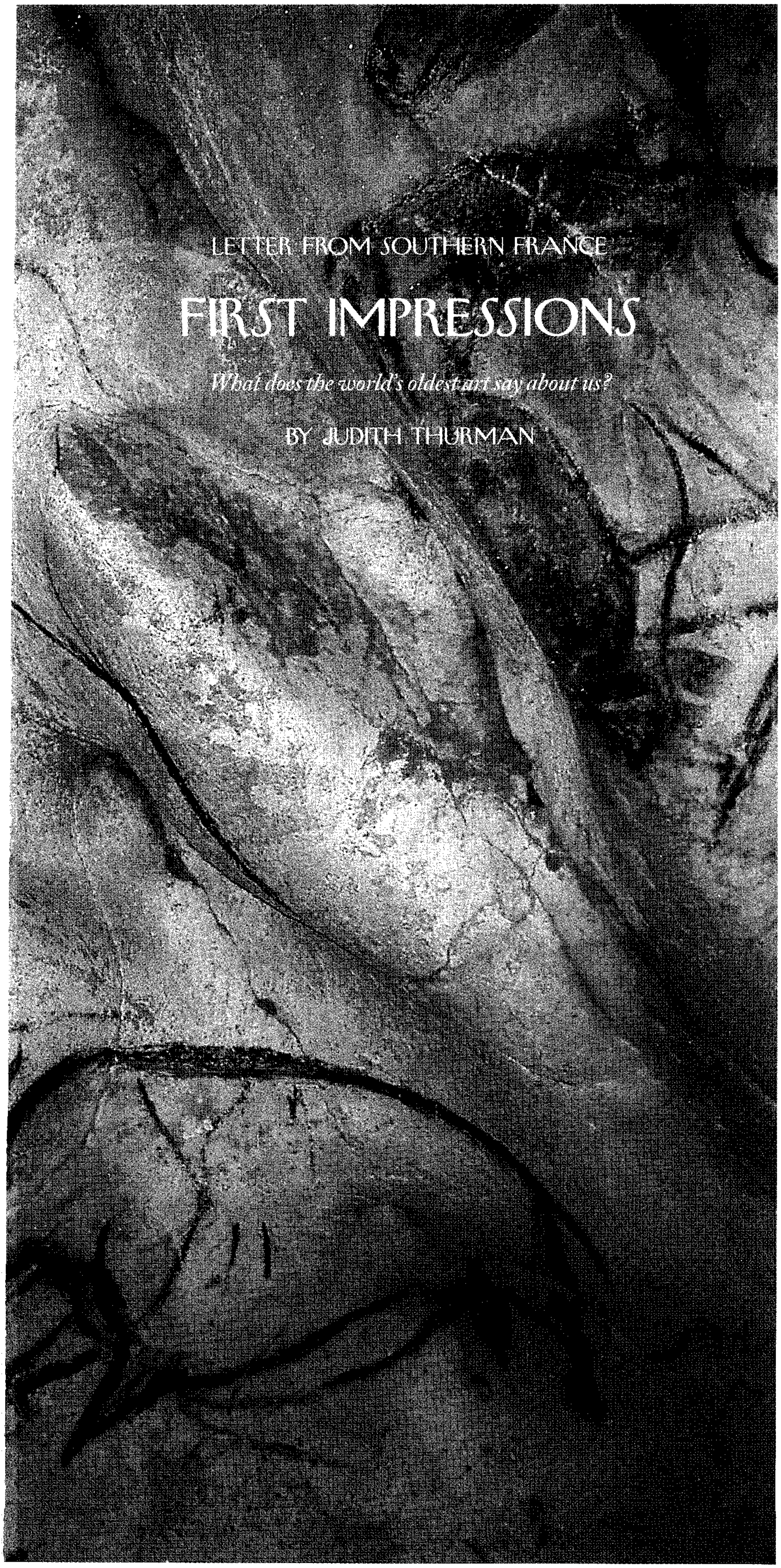
A frieze of horses and rhinos near the Chauvet cave's Megaloceros Gallery, where artists may have gathered to make charcoal. Chau

LETTER FROM SOUTHERN FRANCE

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

What does the world's oldest art say about us?

BY JUDITH THURMAN



ntains the earliest known paintings, from at least thirty-two thousand years ago.

JEAN CLOTTES/CHAUVET CAVE SCIENTIFIC TEAM

During the Old Stone Age, between thirty-seven thousand and eleven thousand years ago, some of the most remarkable art ever conceived was etched or painted on the walls of caves in southern France and northern Spain. After a visit to Lascaux, in the Dordogne, which was discovered in 1940, Picasso reportedly said to his guide, "They've invented everything." What those first artists invented was a language of signs for which there will never be a Rosetta stone; perspective, a technique that was not rediscovered until the Athenian Golden Age; and a bestiary of such vitality and finesse that, by the flicker of torchlight, the animals seem to surge from the walls, and move across them like figures in a magic-lantern show (in that sense, the artists invented animation). They also thought up the grease lamp—a lump of fat, with a plant wick, placed in a hollow stone—to light their workplace; scaffolds to reach high places; the principles of stencilling and Pointillism; powdered colors, brushes, and stumping cloths; and, more to the point of Picasso's insight, the very concept of an image. A true artist reimagines that concept with every blank canvas—but not from a void.

Some caves have rock porches that were used for shelter, but there is no evidence of domestic life in their depths. Sizable groups may have visited the chambers closest to the entrance—perhaps for communal rites—and we know from the ubiquitous handprints that were stamped or airbrushed (using the mouth to blow pigment) on the walls that people of both sexes and all ages, even babies, participated in whatever activities took place. Only a few individuals ventured or were permitted into the furthest reaches of a cave—in some cases, walking or crawling for miles. Those intrepid spelunkers explored every surface. If they bypassed certain walls that to us seem just as suitable for decoration as ones they chose, the placement of the art apparently wasn't capricious. In the course of some twenty-five thousand years, the same animals—primarily bison, stags, aurochs, ibex, horses, and mammoths—recur in similar poses, illustrating an immortal story. For a nomadic people, living at nature's mercy, it must have been a powerful consolation to know that such a refuge from flux existed.

As the painters were learning to crush hematite, and to sharpen embers of Scotch pine for their charcoal (red and black were their primary colors), the last Neanderthals were still living on the vast steppe that was Europe in the Ice Age, which they'd had to themselves for two hundred millennia, while *Homo sapiens* were making their leisurely trek out of Africa. No one can say what the encounters between that low-browed, herculean species and their slighter but formidable successors were like. (Paleolithic artists, despite their penchant for naturalism, rarely chose to depict human beings, and then did so with a crudeness that smacks of mockery, leaving us a mirror but no self-reflection.) Their genomes are discrete, so it appears that either the two populations didn't mate or they couldn't conceive fertile offspring. In any case, they wouldn't have needed to contest their boundless hunting grounds. They coexisted for some eight thousand years, until the Neanderthals withdrew or were forced, in dwindling numbers, toward the arid mountains of southern Spain, making Gibraltar a final redoubt. It isn't known from whom or from what they were retreating (if "retreat" describes their migration), though along the way the arts of the newcomers must have impressed them. Later Neanderthal campsites have yielded some rings and awls carved from ivory, and painted or grooved bones and teeth (nothing of the like predates the arrival of *Homo sapiens*). The pathos of their workmanship—the attempt to copy something novel and marvellous by the dimming light of their existence—nearly makes you weep. And here, perhaps, the cruel notion that we call fashion, a coded expression of rivalry and desire, was born.

The cave artists were as tall as the average Southern European of today, and well nourished on the teeming game and fish they hunted with flint weapons. They are, genetically, our direct ancestors, although "direct" is a relative term. Since recorded history began, around 3200 B.C., with the invention of writing in the Middle East, there have been some two hundred human generations (if one reckons a new one every twenty-five years). Future discoveries may alter the math, but, as it now stands, forty-five hundred generations separate the earliest *Homo sapiens* from the earliest cave artists, and between the artists and us another fifteen hundred generations have descended the birth canal, learned to walk upright, mastered speech and the use of tools, reached puberty, reproduced, and died.

Early last April, I set off for the Ardèche, a mountainous region in south-central France where cave networks are a common geological phenomenon (hundreds are known, dozens with ancient artifacts). It was here, a week before Christmas in 1994, that three spelunkers exploring the limestone cliffs above the Pont d'Arc, a natural bridge of awesome beauty and scale which resembles a giant mammoth straddling the river gorge, unearthed a cave that made front-page news. It proved to contain the oldest known paintings in the world—some fifteen to eighteen thousand years older than the friezes at Lascaux and at Altamira, in the Spanish Basque country—and it was named for its chief discoverer, Jean-Marie Chauvet. Unlike the amateur adventurers or lucky bumblers (in the case of Lascaux, a posse of village urchins and their dog) who have fallen, sometimes literally, upon a cave where early Europeans left their cryptic signatures, Chauvet was a professional—a park ranger working for the Ministry of Culture, and the custodian of other prehistoric sites in the region. He and his partners, Christian Hillaire and Éliette Brunel, were aware of the irreparable damage that even a few indelicate footsteps can cause to an environment that has been sealed for eons—posterity has lost whatever precious relics and evidence that the carelessly trampled floors of Lascaux and Altamira, both now sealed to the public, might have yielded.

The cavers were natives of the Ardèche: three old friends with an interest in archeology. Brunel was the smallest, so when they felt an updraft of cool air coming from a recess near the cliff's ledge—the potential sign of a cavity—they heaved some rocks out of the way, and she squeezed through a tight passage that led to the entrance of a deep shaft. The men followed, and, unfurling a chain ladder, the group descended thirty feet into a soaring grotto with a domed roof whose every surface was blistered or spiked with stalagmites. Where the uneven clay floor had receded, it was littered with calcite accretions—blocks and columns that had broken off—and, in photographs, the wrathful, baroque grandeur of the scene evokes some Biblical act of destruction wreaked upon a temple. As the explorers advanced, moving gingerly, in single file, Brunel suddenly let out a cry: "They have been here!"

The question of who "they" were speaks to a mystery that thinking people of every epoch and place have tried to fathom: who are we? In the century since the modern study of caves began, specialists from at least half a dozen disciplines—archeology, ethnology, ethology, genetics, anthropology, and art history—have tried (and competed) to understand the culture that produced them. The experts tend to fall into two camps: those who can't resist advancing a theory about the art, and those who believe that there isn't, and never will be, enough evidence to support one. Jean Clottes, the celebrated prehistorian and prolific author who assembled the Chauvet research team, in 1996, belongs to the first camp, and most of his colleagues to the second. Yet no one who studies the caves seems able to resist a yearning for communion with the artists. When you consider that their legacy may have been found by chance, but surely wasn't left by chance, it, too, suggests a yearning for communion—with us, their descendants.

Two books published in the past few years, "The Cave Painters" (2006), by Gregory Curtis, and "The Nature of Paleolithic Art" (2005), by R. Dale Guthrie, approach the controversy generated by their subject from different perspectives. Guthrie is an encyclopedic polymath who believes he can "decode" prehistory. Curtis, a former editor of *Texas Monthly*, is a literary detective (his previous book, on the Venus de Milo, also concerned the obscure provenance of an archaic masterpiece), and in quietly enthralling prose, without hurry or flamboyance, he spins two narratives. (The shorter one, as he notes, covers a few million years, and the longer one, the past century.)

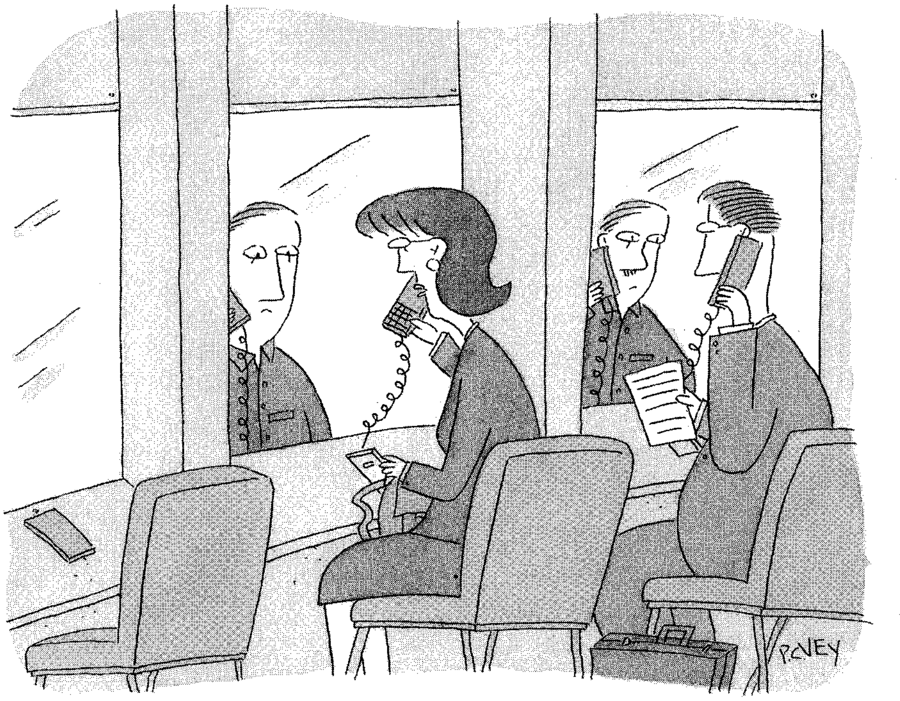
I packed both volumes, along with some hiking boots, protein bars, and other survival gear, all of it unnecessary, for my sojourn in the Ardèche. My destination was a Spartan summer camp—

a concrete barracks in a valley near the Pont d'Arc. It is owned by the regional government, and normally houses groups of schoolchildren on subsidized holidays. But twice a year, for a couple of weeks in the spring and the autumn, the camp is a base for the Chauvet team. They, and only they, are admitted to the cave (and sometimes not even they: last October, the research session was cancelled because the climate hadn't restabilized). Access is so strictly limited not only because traffic causes contamination but also because the French government has been embroiled for thirteen years in multimillion-dollar litigation with Jean-Marie Chauvet and his partners, as well as with the owners of the land on which they found the cave. (The finders are entitled to royalties from reproductions of the art, while the owners are entitled to compensation for a treasure that, at least technically, is their property—the Napoleonic laws, modified in the nineteen-fifties, that give the Republic authority to dispose of any minerals or metals beneath the soil do not apply to cave paintings. Had Chauvet been a gold mine, the suit couldn't have been brought.)

By dusk on the first night, most of the researchers had assembled in the cafeteria for an excellent dinner of rabbit fricassée, served with a Côtes du Vivarais, and followed by a selection of local cheeses. (The Ardèche is a gourmet's paradise, and the camp chef was a tough former sailor from Marseilles whose speech and cooking were equally pungent.) Among the senior team members, Evelyne Debard is a geologist, as is Norbert Aujoulat. He is a former director of research at Lascaux, and the author of a fine book on its art, who calls himself "an underground man." Marc Azéma is a documentary filmmaker who specializes in archeology. Carole Fritz and Gilles Tosello, a husband and wife from Toulouse, are experts in parietal art, and Tosello is a graphic artist whose heroically patient, stroke-by-stroke tracings of the cave's signs and images are essential to their study. Jean-Marc Elalouf, a geneticist, and the author of a poetic essay on Chauvet, has, with a team of graduate students, sequenced the mitochondrial DNA of the cave's numerous bears. They pocked the floor with their hibernation burrows, and, in a space known as the Skull Chamber, a bear's cranium sits on a flat, altar-like pedestal—perhaps enshrined there by the artists. The grotto is littered with other ursine remains, and some of the bones seem to have been planted in the sediment or stuck with intent into the fissured walls. (No human DNA has yet surfaced, and Elalouf doesn't expect to find any.) Dominique Baffier, an official at the Ministry of Culture, is Chauvet's curator. She coördinates the research and conservation. Jean-Michel Geneste, an archeologist, is the director of the project, a post he assumed in 2001, when Jean Clottes, at sixty-seven, took mandatory retirement.

Clottes is a hero of Gregory Curtis's "The Cave Painters," one of the "giants" in a line of willful, brilliant, and often eccentric personalities who have shaped a discipline that prides itself on scientific detachment but has been a battleground for the kind of turf wars that were absent from the caves themselves. No human conflict is recorded in cave art, although at three separate sites there are four ambiguous drawings of a creature with a man's limbs and torso, pierced with spearlike lines. More pertinent, perhaps, is a famous vignette in the shaft at Lascaux. It depicts a rather comical stick figure with an avian beak or mask, a puny physique, and a long skinny penis. He and his erect member seem to have rigor mortis. He is flat on his back at the feet of an exquisitely realistic wounded bison, whose intestines are spilling out. The bison's glance is turned away, but it might have an ironic smile. Could the subject be hubris? Whatever it represents, some mythic contest—and the struggle of prehistorians to interpret their subject is such a contest—has ended in a draw.

Curtis profiles a dynasty of interpreters, beginning with the Spanish nobleman Marcelino Sanz de Sautuola, who discovered Altamira in 1879—it was on his property. (Parts of Niaux and Mas d'Azil, two gigantic painted caves in the Pyrenees, had been known for centuries, but their decorations were regarded as graffiti made in historic times, perhaps by Roman legionaries.) He was accused of art forgery, and his scholarly papers on the paintings' antiquity were ridiculed by two of the era's greatest archeologists, Gabriel de Mortillet and Émile Cartailhac. Sautuola died before Cartailhac repented of his skepticism, in 1902. By then, the art at two important sites, Les Combarelles and Font-de-Gaume (which contains a ravishing portrait of two amorous reindeer), had come to light, and, in 1906, Cartailhac published a lavish compendium of cave



"I've rented the extra room to an escaped convict—maybe you know him."

painting that was subsidized by the Prince of Monaco. The book's much admired illustrations of Altamira were the work of a young priest with a painterly eye, Henri Breuil, who, in the course of half a century, became known as the Pope of Prehistory. He divided the era into four periods, and dated the art by its style and appearance. Aurignacian, the oldest, was followed by Perigordian (later known as Gravettian), Solutrean, and Magdalenian. They were named for type-sites in France: Aurignac, La Gravette, Solutré, and La Madeleine. But Breuil's theory about the art's meaning—that it related to rituals of "hunting magic"—was discredited by subsequent studies.

During the Second World War, Max Raphael, a German art historian who had studied the caves of the Dordogne before fleeing the Nazis to New York, was looking for clues to the art's meaning in its thematic unity. He concluded that the animals represented clan totems, and that the paintings depicted strife and alliances—an archaic saga. In 1951, the year before Raphael died, he sent an extract of his writings to Annette Laming-Emperaire, a young French archeologist who shared his conviction that "prehistory cannot be reconstructed with the aid of ethnography." Beware, in other words, of analogue reasoning, because no one should presume to parse the icons and figures of a vanished society by comparing them with the art of hunter-gatherers from more recent eras. In 1962, she published a doctoral thesis that made her famous. "The Meaning of Paleolithic Rock Art" dismissed the various, too creative theories of its predecessors, and, with them, any residual nineteenth-century prejudice or romance about the "primitive" mind. Laming-Emperaire's structuralist methodology is still in use, much facilitated by computer science. It involves compiling minutely detailed inventories and diagrams of the way that species are grouped on the cave walls; of their gender, frequency, and position; and of their relation to the signs and handprints that often appear close to them. In "Lascaux" (2005), Norbert Aujoulat explains how he and his colleagues added time to the equation. Analyzing the order of superimposed images, they determined that wherever horses, aurochs, and stags appear on the same panel, the horse is beneath, the aurochs in the middle, and the stag on top, and that the variations in their coats correspond to their respective mating seasons. The triad of "horse-aurochs-stag" links the fertility cycles of important, and perhaps sacred or symbolic, animals to the cosmic cycles, suggesting a great metaphor about creation.

SLOW DRAG BLUES

I don't believe in sex

after marriage.
My wife does, just

not with me.
I plead the Fifth

of whiskey. I am close

to perfecting a theory
of forgettability.

Grief a dog
that keeps dogging me—

Good Grief,
I say. It's me

he's teaching to beg—

my next anniversary
is newspaper, yesterday's—

lining my cage—
Tomorrow the day

I hope to learn to stay.

—*Kevin Young*

Laming-Emperaire had an eminent thesis adviser, André Leroi-Gourhan, who revolutionized the practice of excavation by recognizing that a vertical dig destroys the context of a site. In twenty years (1964-84) of insanely painstaking labor—scraping the soil in small horizontal squares at Pincevent, a twelve-thousand-year-old campsite on the Seine—he and his disciples gave us one of the richest pictures to date of Paleolithic life as the Old Stone Age was ending.

A new age in the science of prehistory had begun in 1949, when radiocarbon dating was invented by Willard Libby, a chemist from Chicago. One of Libby's first experiments was on a piece of charcoal from Lascaux. Breuil had, incorrectly, it turns out, classified the cave as Perigordian. (It is Magdalenian.) He had also made the Darwinian assumption that the most ancient art was the most primitive, and Leroi-Gourhan worked on the same premise. In that respect, Chauvet was a bombshell. It is Aurignacian, and its earliest paintings are at least thirty-two thousand years old, yet they are just as sophisticated as much later compositions. What emerged with that revelation was an image of Paleolithic artists transmitting their techniques from generation to generation for twenty-five millennia with almost no innovation or revolt. A profound conservatism in art, Curtis notes, is one of the hallmarks of a "classical civilization." For the conventions of cave painting to have endured four times as long as recorded history, the culture it served, he concludes, must have been “deeply satisfying”—and stable to a degree it is hard for modern humans to imagine.

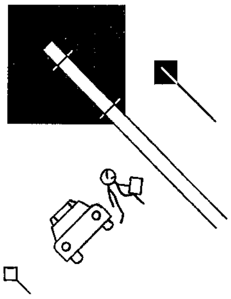
Jean Clottes is a tall, cordial man of seventy-four, who still attends the biannual sessions at Chauvet, conducting his own research (this April, he and Marc Azéma found a new panel of signs), while continuing to travel and lecture widely. The latest addition to his bibliography, “Cave Art,” a luxuriously illustrated “imaginary museum” of the Old Stone Age, is due out from Phaidon this summer.

Clottes’s eminence in his field was never preordained. He once taught high-school English in Foix, a city in the Pyrenees, near the Andorran border, which is an epicenter for decorated caves. He studied archeology in his spare time, and earned a doctorate at forty-one, when he quit teaching. He had been moonlighting in a job that gave him privileged access to new caves, and an impressive calling card—as the director of prehistory for the Midi-Pyrenees—but a nominal salary. The appointment was made official in 1971, and for the next two decades Clottes was usually the first responder at the scene of a new discovery. The most sensational find, before Chauvet, was Cosquer—a painted cave near Marseilles that could be reached only through a treacherous underwater tunnel, in which three divers had drowned. Like Altamira, Cosquer was, at first, attacked as a hoax, and some of the press coverage impeached Clottes’s integrity as its authenticator. He could judge its art only from photographs, but, in 1992, a year after Cosquer was revealed, carbon dating proved that the earliest paintings are at least twenty-seven thousand years old. That year, the Ministry of Culture elevated him to the rank of inspector general.

At the base camp, Clottes bunked down, as did everyone, in a dorm room, and braved the morning hoarfrost for a dash to the communal showers. There is a boyish quality to his energy and conviction. (At sixty-nine, he learned to scuba dive so that he could finally explore Cosquer himself.) One evening, he showed us a film about his “baptism,” in 2007, as an honorary Tuareg; the North African nomads crowned him with a turban steeped in indigo that stained his forehead, and he danced to their drums by a Saharan campfire. Among his own sometimes fractious tribesmen, Clottes also commands the respect due an unusually vigorous elder, and it was hard to keep pace with him as he scampered on his long legs up the steep cliff to Chauvet, talking with verve the entire way.

The path skirts a vineyard, then veers up into the woods, emerging onto a corniche—a natural terrace with a rocky overhang on one side, and a precipitous drop on the other. “En route to Chauvet, the painters might have sheltered here or prepared their pigments. Looking at the valley and the river gorge, they saw what we do,” Clottes said, indicating a magnificent view. “The topography hasn’t changed much, except that the Ice Age vegetation was much sparser: mostly evergreens, like fir and pine. Without all the greenery, the resemblance of the Pont d’Arc to a giant mammoth would have been even more dramatic. But nothing of the landscape—clouds, earth, sun, moon, rivers, or plant life, and, only rarely, a horizon—figures in cave art. It’s one among many striking omissions.”

Where the terrace ended, we plunged back into the underbrush, following a track obstructed by rocks and brambles, and, after about half an hour of climbing, we arrived at the entrance that Jean-Marie Chauvet and his partners discovered. (The prehistoric entrance has been plugged, for millennia, by a landslide.) A shallow cave at the trailhead has been fitted out as a storeroom for gear and supplies. From here, a wooden ramp guides one along a narrow ledge, shaped like a horseshoe, that was formed when the cliffs receded, to a massive metal door that’s as well defended—with voice alarms, video surveillance, and a double key system—as a bank vault. Some members of the team relaxed with a cigarette or a cold drink and a little academic gossip, but Clottes immediately changed into his spelunking overalls, donned a hard hat with a miner’s lamp, and disappeared into the underworld.



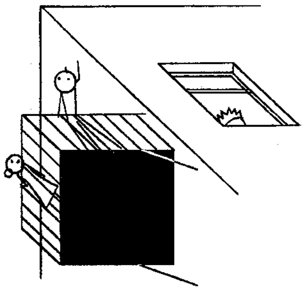
On a map, Chauvet resembles the British Isles, and, like an island with coves and promontories, its outline is irregular. The distance from the entrance to the deepest gallery is about eight hundred feet, and, at the northern end, the cave forks into two horn-shaped branches. In some places, like the grotto that Éliette Brunel first plumbed in 1994 (it is named for her), the terrain is rocky and chaotic, while in others, like the Chamber of the Bear Hollows, the walls and floor are relatively smooth. (In the nineteen-nineties, a metal catwalk was installed to protect the cave bed.) The ceilings of the principal galleries vary in height from about five to forty feet, but there are passages and alcoves where an adult has to kneel or crawl. Twenty-six thousand years ago (six millennia after the first paintings were created), a lone adolescent left his footprints and torch swipes in the furthest reaches of the western horn, the Gallery of the Crosshatching.

The Megaloceros Gallery—a funnel in the eastern horn named for the huge, elklike herbivores that mingle on the walls with rhinos, horses, bison, a glorious ibex, three abstract vulvas, and assorted geometric signs—is the narrowest part of the cave, and it seems to have been a gathering point or a staging area where the artists built hearths to produce their charcoal. Dominique Baffier, the curator, and Valérie Feruglio, a young archeologist who arrived at the base camp during my visit with her new baby, were moved to write in “Chauvet Cave” (2001), a book of essays and photography on the team’s research, “The freshness of these remains gives the impression that . . . we interrupted the Aurignacians in their task and caused them to flee abruptly.” They dropped an ivory projectile, which was found in the sediment.

From here, one emerges into the deepest recess of Chauvet, the End Chamber, a spectacular vaulted space that contains more than a third of the cave’s etchings and paintings—a few in ochre, most in charcoal, and all meticulously composed. A great frieze covers the back left wall: a pride of lions with Pointillist whiskers seems to be hunting a herd of bison, which appear to have stampeded a troop of rhinos, one of which looks as if it had fallen into, or is climbing out of, a cavity in the rock. As at many sites, the scratches made by a standing bear have been overlaid with a palimpsest of signs or drawings, and one has to wonder if cave art didn't begin with a recognition that bear claws were an expressive tool for engraving a record—poignant and indelible—of a stressed creature's passage through the dark.

To the far right of the frieze, on a separate wall, a huge, finely modelled bison stands alone, gazing stage left toward a pair of figures painted on a conical outcropping of rock that descends from the ceiling and comes to a point about four feet above the floor. The fleshy shape of this pendant is unmistakably phallic, and all of its sides are decorated, though only the front is clearly visible. The floor of the End Chamber is littered with relics. In order to preserve them, the catwalk stops close to the entrance, and the innermost alcove, known as the Sacristy, remains to be explored. But one of the team's archeologists, Yanik Le Guillou, rigged a digital camera to a pole, and was able to photograph the pendant's far side. Wrapped around, or, as it appears, straddling, the phallus is the bottom half of a woman's body, with heavy thighs and bent knees that taper at the ankle. Her vulva is darkly shaded, and she has no feet. Hovering above her is a creature with a bison's head and hump, and an aroused, white eye. But a line branching from its neck looks like a human arm with fingers. The relationship of these figures to each other, and to the frieze on the adjacent wall, is among the great enigmas in cave art. The woman's posture suggests that she may be squatting in childbirth, and the animals, on a level with her loins, seem to be streaming away from her. Gregory Curtis, who fights and loses a valiant battle with his urge to speculate, admits in "The Cave Painters" that he can't help reading a mythical narrative into the scene, one that relates to the Minotaur—the hybrid offspring of a mortal woman and a sacred bull "who lived in the Labyrinth, which is a kind of cave." Art on the walls of Cretan palaces depicts the spectacle of youths leapfrogging a charging bull, and that public spectacle—in the guise of the bullfight—has, he points out, endured into modern times precisely in the regions where decorated caves are most concentrated. "European culture began somewhere," he concludes. "Why not right here?"

In the course of a friendly correspondence, Yanik Le Guillou gave Curtis a warning about indulging his imagination. Perhaps that sin might be forgiven in an American journalist, but not in Jean Clottes. The book that sets forth his controversial theory about the art, "The Shamans of Prehistory," co-written with the South African archeologist David Lewis-Williams, and published in 1996—the year Clottes took over at Chauvet—detonated a polemical firestorm that hasn't entirely subsided. Defying the prohibitions against importing evidence to the caves from external sources, the authors grounded their interpretation in Lewis-Williams's studies of shamanism among hunter-gatherers, historical and contemporary, and of African rock art, specifically the paintings of a nomadic people, the San, whose shamans still serve as spiritual mediators with the powers of nature and with the dead. In an earlier article, "The Signs of All Times," written with the anthropologist T. A. Dowson, Lewis-Williams had explored what he called "a neurological bridge" to the Old Stone Age. The authors cited laboratory experiments with subjects in an induced-trance state which suggested that the human optic system generates the same types of visual illusions, in the same three stages, differing only slightly by culture, whatever the stimulus: drugs, music, pain, fasting, repetitive movements, solitude, or high carbon-dioxide levels (a phenomenon that is common in close underground chambers). In the first stage, a subject sees a pattern of points, grids, zigzags, and other abstract forms (familiar from the caves); in the second stage, these forms morph into objects—the zigzags, for example, might become a serpent. In the third and deepest stage, a subject feels sucked into a dark vortex that generates intense hallucinations, often of monsters or animals, and feels his body and spirit merging with theirs.



Peoples who practice shamanism believe in a tiered cosmos: an upper world (the heavens); an underworld; and the mortal world. When Clottes joined forces with Lewis-Williams, he had come to believe that cave painting largely represents the experiences of shamans or initiates on a vision quest to the underworld, where spirits gathered. The caves served as a gateway, and their walls were considered porous. Where the artists or their entourage left handprints, they were palping a living rock in the hopes of reaching or summoning a force beyond it. They typically incorporated the rock's contours and fissures into the outlines of their drawings—as a horn, a hump, or a haunch—so that a frieze becomes a bas-relief. But, in doing so, they were also locating the dwelling place of an animal from their visions, and bodying it forth.

This scenario has its loose ends, particularly in the art's untrancelike fidelity to nature, but it fits the dreamlike suspension of the animals in a vacuum, and it helps to explain three of the most sensational figures in cave art. One is the bison-man at Chauvet; another is the bird-man at Lascaux; and the third, known as the Sorcerer, looks down from a perch close to the high ceiling at Les Trois Frères, a Magdalenian cave in the Pyrenees. He has the ears and antlers of a stag; handlike paws; athletic human legs and haunches; a horse's tail; and a long, rather elegantly groomed wizard's beard.

Clottes was hurt and outraged by the rancor of the attacks that greeted "The Shamans of Prehistory" ("psychedelic ravings," one critic wrote), and the authors defended themselves in a subsequent edition. "You can advance a scientific hypothesis without claiming certainty," Clottes told me one evening. "Everyone agrees that the paintings are, in some way, religious. I'm not a believer myself, and I'm certainly not a mystic.

“Take my advice, Roberts, and hide your light under a bushel.”

But *Homo sapiens* is *Homo spiritualis.* The ability to make tools defines us less than the need to create belief systems that influence nature. And shamanism is the most prevalent belief system of hunter-gatherers.”

Yet even members of the Chauvet team feel that Clottes’s theories on shamanism go too far. The divide seems, in part, to be generational. The strict purists tend to be younger, perhaps because they came of age with deconstruction, in a climate of political correctness, and are warier of their own baggage. “I don’t mind stating uncategorically that it’s impossible to know what the art means,” Carole Fritz said. Norbert Aujoulat tactfully told me, “We’re more reserved than Jean is. He may be right about the practice of shamanism in the caves, but many of us simply don’t want to interpret them.” He added with a laugh, “If I knew what the art meant, I’d be out of business. But in my own experience—I’ve inventoried five hundred caves—the more you look, the less you understand.”

For an older generation, on more intimate terms with mortality, it may be harder to accept the lack of resolution to a life’s work. Jean-Michel Geneste, a leonine man of fifty-nine with a silver mane, told me about an experiment that he had conducted at Lascaux in 1994. (In addition to directing the work at Chauvet, he is the curator of Lascaux, and last winter he had to deal with an invasion of fungus that was threatening the paintings there.) Geneste decided to invite four elders of an Aboriginal tribe, the Ngarinyins—hunter-gatherers from northwestern Australia—to visit the cave, and put them up at his house in the Dordogne. “I explained that I would be taking them to a place where ancients had, like their own ancestors, left marks and paintings on the walls, so that perhaps they could explain them,” he said. “ ‘They’re your ancestors?’ they asked. I said no, and that stupid reply made them afraid. If we weren’t visiting my ancestors, they wouldn’t enter their sanctuary, and risk the consequences. I was terribly disappointed, and finally, as good guests, they agreed to take a look. But first they had to purify themselves, so they built a fire, and pulled some of their underarm hair out and burned it. Their own rituals involve traversing a screen of smoke—passing into another zone. When they entered the cave, they took a while to get their bearings. Yes, they said, it was an initiation site. The geometric signs, in red and black, reminded them of their own clan insignia, the animals and engravings of figures from their creation myths.”

Geneste agrees with their reading, but he also believes that a cave like Lascaux or Chauvet served many purposes—“the way a twelfth-century church did. Everyone must have heard that these sanctuaries existed, and felt drawn to them. Look at the Pont d’Arc: it’s a great beacon in the landscape. And, like the art in a church, the richness of graphic expression in the caves was satisfying to lots of different people in different ways—familial, communal, and individual, across the millennia—so there is probably no one adequate explanation, no unified theory, for it.”

For the next week, I climbed the hill to Chauvet once a day. A guardian, Charles Chauveau, who, by law, has to be present when the scientists are underground, took me hiking, and we scaled the cliffs to sun our faces on a boulder, watching the first rafters of the season negotiate the river and pass under the Pont d’Arc. Only a few members of the team enter the cave at a time, each to pursue his or her research, though because of potential hazards, especially carbon-dioxide intoxication, no fewer than three can ever be alone there. “In the old days, when you sometimes had Chauvet to yourself, it was awesome and a little frightening,” the geologist Evelyne Debard said. But Aujoulat felt more intimidated at Lascaux. “I used to spend a solitary hour there once a week,” he said. “I rehearsed all my gestures, so I wouldn’t lose time. But after a while it became oppressive: those huge animals staring you down in a small space—trying, or so it feels, to dominate you.”

Those who have elected to stay behind spend the day in a prosaic annex next to the camp parking lot which was built to provide the team with office space and computer outlets. Marc Azéma, who has collaborated with Clottes on books about Chauvet’s lions (he also filmed the Tuareg baptism), gave me a virtual cave tour on a big monitor. Of necessity, Fritz and Tosello spend more time Photoshopping their research than conducting field work. (Henri Breuil made tracings directly from cave walls—an unthinkable sacrilege to modern archeologists.) They digitally photograph an image section by section, print the picture to scale, and take it back underground, where Tosello sets up a drawing board as close as possible to the area of study. The digital image is overlaid with a sheet of clear plastic, and he traces the image onto the sheet, referring constantly to the original painting as he does so. This dynamic act of translation gives him a deeper insight into the artists' gestures and techniques than a mere reading would. He repeats the process on successive plastic sheets, each one focussed on a separate aspect of the composition, including the rock's contours. Then he transfers the tracings (as many as a dozen layers) onto the computer, where they can be magnified and manipulated. Describing the detail in a monumental frieze of horses between the Megaloceros Chamber and the Skull Chamber, Fritz and Tosello wrote, in "Chauvet Cave":

> Once again, the surface was carefully scraped beneath the throat, which suggests to us a moment of reflection, or perhaps doubt. . . . The last horse is unquestionably the most successful of the group, perhaps because the artist is by now certain of his or her inspiration. This fourth horse was produced using a complex technique: the main lines were drawn with charcoal; the infill, colored sepia and brown, is a mixture of charcoal and clay spread with the finger. A series of fine engravings perfectly follow the profile. With energetic and precise movements, the significant details are indicated (nostril, open mouth). A final charcoal line, dark black, was placed just at the corner of the lips and gives this head an expression of astonishment or surprise.

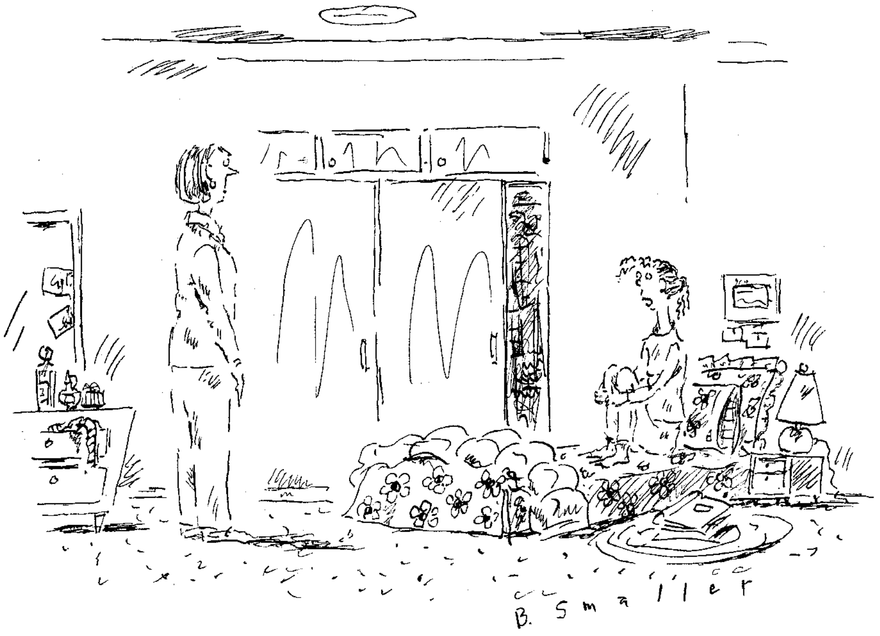
While the team was at work, I often stayed on the cliff with Chauveau, reading Dale Guthrie's book at a picnic table. Guthrie, a professor emeritus of zoology at the University of Alaska, specializes in the paleobiology of the Pleistocene era. Not only is he an expert on the large mammals that cavort on cave walls; he has spent forty years in the Arctic wilds hunting their descendants with a bow and arrow. In that respect, perhaps, he brings more empiricism to his research than other scholars, though he also brings less humility. "The Nature of Paleolithic Art," as its title suggests, aspires to be definitive.

It is a handsome, five-hundred-page volume composed, like a mosaic, of boxed highlights, arresting graphics, and short sections of text that distill a wealth of multi-disciplinary research. The prose, like the layout, is designed to engage a layman without vulgarizing the science, or, at least, not too much. Guthrie, who sounds and looks, in his author's photograph, like an earthy guy, has fun with occasional rib-nudging subtitles ("Lesbian Loving or Male Fantasy?," "Graffiti and Testosterone"), but they promote a premise at least as audacious as that of Clottes and Lewis-Williams: that our biology, expressed in our carnal appetites and attractions, including an attraction to the supernatural, is a "baseline of truth" for the cave artists' symbolic language.

Nearly all the illustrations are Guthrie's own renderings or interpretations of Paleolithic imagery (there are no photographs). A number of prehistorians are and have been, as he is, gifted draftsmen and copyists. But unlike the devout Breuil, or the cautious Tosello, Guthrie is a desacralizer. He admires the creative "freedom" of cave art—an acuity of observation coupled with, in his view, a nonchalance of composition. He stresses its erotic playfulness, even straining to discern evidence of dildos and bondage, despite the rarity of sexual acts depicted on walls or artifacts. ("No Sex, Please—We're Aurignacian" was the title of a scholarly paper on the period.) The reverence with which certain researchers—including, one infers, the Chauvet team—treat even the smallest nick in a cave strikes him as a bit too nice, and, where they perceive an elaborate, if obscure, metaphysics, he sees high-spirited improvisation. "Some Paleolithic images identified as part man and part beast may simply be artistic bloopers," he writes. (But the artists sometimes did correct their work, Azéma told me, by scraping the rock's surface.)

Paleobiology is, in part, a science of statistical modelling, and, analyzing the handprints in the caves, Guthrie argues that many, perhaps a majority, of the artists were not the "Michelangelos" of Lascaux or Chauvet but teenage boys, who, being boys, loved rutting and rumbling and, in essence, went on tagging sprees. It is true that among the masterpieces there are many line drawings, including pubic triangles, that seem hasty, impish, or doodle-like. In Guthrie's view, prehistorians have imported their mandarin pieties, and the bias of a society where children are a minority, to the study of what, demographically, was a free-wheeling youth culture.

Guthrie is both provocative and respected—Clottes wrote one of the cover blurbs on his book—but some of his methods make you wonder how much of the light that he throws onto the nature of the art owes to false clarity. By culling examples of erotica from a huge catchment area without noting their size, date, or position, he distorts their prevalence. His cleaned-up drawings minimize the art's bewildering ambiguity and the contouring or the cave architecture organic to many compositions. As for the bands of brothers



"I don't blame you for everything—I blame Dad for some things, too."

spelunking on a dare, and leaving what Guthrie calls their "children's art" to bemuse posterity, the life expectancy for the era was, as he notes, about eighteen, since infant mortality was exorbitant. But those who lived on could, thanks to the rarity of infectious diseases and the abundance of protein, expect to survive for thirty years more—considerably longer than the Greeks, the Romans, or the medieval peasants who built Chartres. Can puerility as we know it—horny, reckless, and transgressive—be attributed to a people for whom early parenthood and virtuosity in survival skills were, as Guthrie acknowledges, imperative? Rash spelunkers die every year, yet no human remains have been discovered in the caves (with the exception of a single skeleton, that of a young man, at Vilhonneur, near Angoulême, and those of five adults who were buried at Cussac, in the Dordogne). That is a staggering testament to the artists' sureness of foot and purpose, if not to their solemnity.

A few days before Easter, I left the camp and drove southwest, over the mountains, stopping at the town of Albi, where the Toulouse-Lautrec Museum, in a thirteenth-century palace off the cathedral square, has a small gallery of Stone and Bronze Age artifacts. I wanted to see the museum's tiny Solutrean carving, in red sandstone, of an obese woman with impressive buttocks. She seemed well housed among Toulouse-Lautrec's louche Venuses. By the next evening, in a thunderstorm, I had reached Jean Clottes's home town of Foix, and found an old-fashioned hotel that he had recommended. From a corner table in the dining room, I could watch the swollen Ariège River flowing toward a distant wall of snow-covered peaks—the Pyrenees—that were black against a livid sunset. The Neanderthals had come this way.

Pascal Alard, an archeologist, met me the next morning at Niaux, where he has conducted research for twenty years. It is one of three caves (with Chauvet and Lascaux) that Clottes, who had arranged the rendezvous, considers paradigmatic. I had driven south for about forty minutes, the last few miles on a road with hairpin turns that wound up into flinty, striated hills. The site was nothing like Chauvet. There was, for one thing, a parking lot at the entrance, deserted at that hour, a bookshop, and an imposing architectural sculpture, in Cor-ten steel, cantilevered into the cliff. (It is supposed to represent an imaginary prehistoric animal.)

Niaux is Magdalenian—its walls were decorated about fourteen thousand years ago—and it was one of the first caves to be explored. Visitors from the seventeenth century left graffiti, as did pranksters for the next three hundred years. In 1866, an archeologist named Félix Garrigou, who was looking for prehistoric relics, confessed to his journal that he couldn't figure out the "funny-looking" paintings. "Amateur artists drew animals here," he noted, "but why?"

Niaux's enormity—a network of passages that are nearly a mile deep from the entrance gallery, which was used as a shelter during the Bronze Age, to the Great Dome, at the far end, branching like a cactus into narrow alcoves and low-ceilinged funnels, but also into chambers the size of an amphitheatre—helps to give it a stable climate, and small groups can make guided visits at appointed times. But when Alard had unlocked the door, and it closed behind us, we were alone. He had two electric torches, and he gave me one. "Don't lose it," he joked. He told me that he and some colleagues, all of whom know the cave intimately, decided, one day, to see if they could find their way out without a light source. None of them could.

The floor near the mouth was fairly flat, but as we went deeper it listed and swelled unpredictably. Water was dripping, and sometimes it sounded like a sinister whispered conversation. The caves are full of eerie noises that gurgle up from the bowels of the earth, yet I had a feeling of traversing a space that wasn't terrestrial. We were, in fact, walking on the bed of a primordial river. Where the passage narrowed, we squeezed between two rocks, like a turnstile, marked with four lines. They were swipes of a finger dipped in red pigment that resembled a bar code, or symbolic flames. Further along, there was a large panel of dots, lines, and arrows, some red, some black. I felt their power without understanding it until I recalled what Norbert Aujoulat had told me about the signs at Cussac. He was the second modern human to explore the cave, in 2000, the year it was unearthed, some twenty-two thousand years after the painters had departed. (The first was Cussac's discoverer, Marc Delluc.) "As we trailed the artists deeper and deeper, noting where they'd broken off stalagmites to mark their path, we found signs that seemed to say, 'We're sanctifying a finite space in an infinite universe.' "

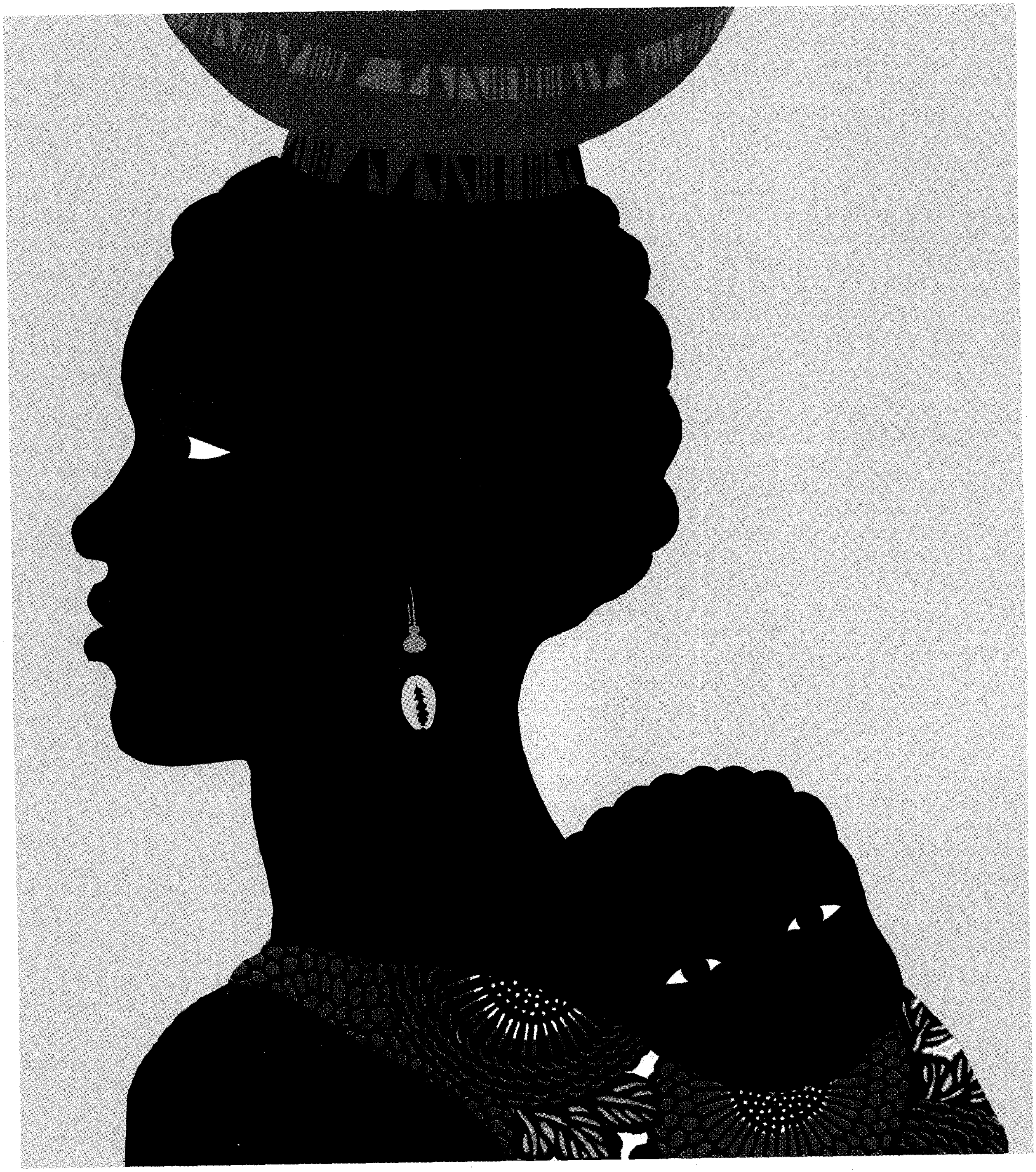
Beyond the turnstile, the passage widens for about six hundred feet, veering to the right, where it leads to one of the grandest bestiaries in Paleolithic art: the Black Salon, a rotunda a hundred and thirty feet in diameter. Scores of animals were painted in sheltered spots on the floor, or etched in charcoal on the soaring walls: bison, stags, ibex, aurochs, and, what is rarer, fish (salmon), and Niaux's famous "bearded horses"—a shaggy, short-legged species that, Clottes writes in his new book, has been reintroduced from their native habitat, in Central Asia, to French wildlife parks. All these creatures are drawn in profile with a fine point, and some of their silhouettes have been filled in with a brush or a stumping cloth. I looked for a little ibex, twenty-one inches long, that Clottes had described to me as the work of a perfectionist, and one of the most beautiful animals in a cave. When I found him, he looked so perky that I couldn't help laughing. Alard was patient, and, since time loses its contours underground, I didn't know how long we had spent there. "I imagine that you want to see more," he said after a while, so we moved along.

Every encounter with a cave animal takes it and you by surprise. Your light has to rouse it, and your eye has to recognize it, because you tend to see creatures that aren't there, while missing ones that are. Halfway home to the mortal world, I asked Alard if we could pause and turn off our torches. The acoustics magnify every sound, and it takes the brain a few minutes to accept the totality of the darkness—your sight keeps grasping for a hold. Whatever the art means, you understand, at that moment, that its vessel is both a womb and a sepulchre. ♦

FICTION

THE HEADSTRONG HISTORIAN

BY CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE



Many years after her husband had died, Nwamgba still closed her eyes from time to time to relive his nightly visits to her hut, and the mornings after, when she would walk to the stream humming a song, thinking of the smoky scent of him and the firmness of his weight, and feeling as if she were surrounded by light. Other memories of Obierika also remained clear—his stubby fingers curled around his flute when he played in the evenings, his delight when she set down his bowls of food, his sweaty back when he brought baskets filled with fresh clay for her pottery. From the moment she had first seen him, at a wrestling match, both of them staring and staring, both of them too young, her waist not yet wearing the menstruation cloth, she had believed with a quiet stubbornness that her chi and his chi had destined their marriage, and so when he and his relatives came to her father a few years later with pots of palm wine she told her mother that this was the man she would marry. Her mother was aghast. Did Nwamgba not know that Obierika was an only child, that his late father had been an only child whose wives had lost pregnancies and buried babies? Perhaps somebody in their family had committed the taboo of selling a girl into slavery and the earth god Ani was visiting misfortune on them. Nwamgba ignored her mother. She went into her father's *obi* and told him she would run away from any other man's house if she was not allowed to marry Obierika. Her father found her exhausting, this sharp-tongued, headstrong daughter who had once wrestled her brother to the ground. (Her father had had to warn those who saw this not to let anyone outside the compound know that a girl had thrown a boy.) He, too, was concerned about the infertility in Obierika's family, but it was not a bad family: Obierika's late father had taken the Ozo title; Obierika was already giving out his seed yams to sharecroppers. Nwamgba would not starve if she married him. Besides, it was better that he let his daughter go with the man she chose than to endure years of trouble in which she would keep returning home after confrontations with her in-laws; and so he gave his blessing, and she smiled and called him by his praise name.

YVETTA FEDOROVA

To pay her bride price, Obierika came with two maternal cousins, Okafo and Okoye, who were like brothers to him. Nwamgba loathed them at first sight. She saw a grasping envy in their eyes that afternoon, as they drank palm wine in her father's *obi;* and in the following years—years in which Obierika took titles and widened his compound and sold his yams to strangers from afar—she saw their envy blacken. But she tolerated them, because they mattered to Obierika, because he pretended not to notice that they didn't work but came to him for yams and chickens, because he wanted to imagine that he had brothers. It was they who urged him, after her third miscarriage, to marry another wife. Obierika told them that he would give it some thought, but when they were alone in her hut at night he assured her that they would have a home full of children, and that he would not marry another wife until they were old, so that they would have somebody to care for them. She thought this strange of him, a prosperous man with only one wife, and she worried more than he did about their childlessness, about the songs that people sang, the melodious mean-spirited words: She has sold her womb. She has eaten his penis. He plays his flute and hands over his wealth to her.

Once, at a moonlight gathering, the square full of women telling stories and learning new dances, a group of girls saw Nwamgba and began to sing, their aggressive breasts pointing at her. She asked if they would mind singing a little louder, so that she could hear the words and then show them who was the greater of two tortoises. They stopped singing. She enjoyed their fear, the way they backed away from her, but it was then that she decided to find a wife for Obierika herself.

Nwamgba liked going to the Oyi stream, untying her wrapper from her waist and walking down the slope to the silvery rush of water that burst out from a rock. The waters of Oyi seemed fresher than those of the other stream, Ogalanya, or perhaps it was simply that Nwamgba felt comforted by the shrine of the Oyi goddess, tucked away in a corner; as a child she had learned that Oyi was the protector of women, the reason it was taboo to sell women into slavery. Nwamgba's closest friend, Ayaju, was already at the stream, and as Nwamgba helped Ayaju raise her pot to her head she asked her who might be a good second wife for Obierika.

She and Ayaju had grown up together and had married men from the same clan. The difference between them, though, was that Ayaju was of slave descent. Ayaju did not care for her husband, Okenwa, who she said resembled and smelled like a rat, but her marriage prospects had been limited; no man from a freeborn family would have come for her hand. Ayaju was a trader, and her rangy, quick-moving body spoke of her many journeys; she had even travelled beyond Onicha. It was she who had first brought back tales of the strange customs of the Igala and Edo traders, she who had first told stories of the white-skinned men who had arrived in Onicha with mirrors and fabrics and the biggest guns the people of those parts had ever seen. This cosmopolitanism earned her respect, and she was the only person of slave descent who talked loudly at the Women's Council, the only person who had answers for everything. She promptly suggested, for Obierika's second wife, a young girl from the Okonkwo family, who had beautiful wide hips and who was respectful, nothing like the other young girls of today, with their heads full of nonsense.

As they walked home from the stream, Ayaju said that perhaps Nwamgba should do what other women in her situation did—take a lover and get pregnant in order to continue Obierika's lineage. Nwamgba's retort was sharp, because she did not like Ayaju's tone, which suggested that Obierika was impotent, and, as if in response to her thoughts, she felt a furious stabbing sensation in her back and knew that she was pregnant again, but she said nothing, because she knew, too, that she would lose it again.

Her miscarriage happened a few weeks later, lumpy blood running down her legs. Obierika comforted her and suggested that they go to the famous oracle, Kisa, as soon as she was well enough for the half day's journey. After the *dibia* had consulted the oracle, Nwamgba cringed at the thought of sacrificing a whole cow; Obierika certainly had greedy ancestors. But they performed the ritual cleansings and the sacrifices as required, and when she suggested that he go and see the Okonkwo family about their daughter he delayed and delayed until another sharp pain spliced her back, and, months later, she was lying on a pile of freshly washed banana leaves behind her hut, straining and pushing until the baby slipped out.

They named him Anikwenwa: the earth god Ani had finally granted a child. He was dark and solidly built, and had Obierika's happy curiosity. Obierika took him to pick medicinal herbs, to collect clay for Nwamgba's pottery, to twist yam vines at the farm. Obierika's cousins Okafo and Okoye visited often. They marvelled at how well Anikwenwa played the flute, how quickly he was learning poetry and wrestling moves from his father, but Nwamgba saw the glowing malevolence that their smiles could not hide. She feared for her child and for her husband, and when Obierika died—a man who had been hearty and laughing and drinking palm wine moments before he slumped—she knew that they had killed him with medicine. She clung to his corpse until a neighbor slapped her to make her let go; she lay in the cold ash for days, tore at the patterns shaved into her hair. Obierika's death left her with an unending despair. She thought often of a woman who, after losing a tenth child, had gone to her back yard and hanged herself on a kola-nut tree. But she would not do it, because of Anikwenwa.

Later, she wished she had made Obierika's cousins drink his *mmili ozu* before the oracle. She had witnessed this once, when a wealthy man died and his family forced his rival to drink his *mmili ozu*. Nwamgba had watched an unmarried woman take a cupped leaf full of water, touch it to the dead man's body, all the time speaking solemnly, and give the leaf-cup to the accused man. He drank. Everyone looked to make sure that he swallowed, a grave silence in the air, because they knew that if he was guilty he would die. He died days later, and his family lowered their heads in shame. Nwamgba felt strangely shaken by it all. She should have insisted on this with Obierika's cousins, but she had been blinded by grief and now Obierika was buried and it was too late.

His cousins, during the funeral, took his ivory tusk, claiming that the trappings of titles went to brothers and not to sons. It was when they emptied his barn of yams and led away the adult goats in his pen that she confronted them, shouting, and when they brushed her aside she waited until evening, then walked around the clan singing about their wickedness, the abominations they were heaping on the land by cheating a widow, until the elders asked them to leave her alone. She complained to the Women's Council, and twenty women went at night to Okafo's and Okoye's homes, brandishing pestles, warning them to leave Nwamgba alone. But Nwamgba knew that those grasping cousins would never really stop. She dreamed of killing them. She certainly could, those weaklings who had spent their lives scrounging off Obierika instead of working, but, of course, she would be banished then, and there would be no one to care for her son. Instead, she took Anikwenwa on long walks, telling him that the land from that palm tree to that avocado tree was theirs, that his grandfather had passed it on to his father. She told him the same things over and over, even though he looked bored and bewildered, and she did not let him go and play at moonlight unless she was watching.

Ayaju came back from a trading journey with another story: the women in Onicha were complaining about the white men. They had welcomed the white men's trading station, but now the white men wanted to tell them how to trade, and when the elders of Agueke refused to place their thumbs on a paper the white men came at night with their normal-men helpers and razed the village. There was nothing left. Nwamgba did not understand. What sort of guns did these white men have? Ayaju laughed and said that their guns were nothing like the rusty thing her own husband owned; she spoke with pride, as though she herself were responsible for the superiority of the white men's guns. Some white men were visiting different clans, asking parents to send their children to school, she added, and she had decided to send her son Azuka, who was the laziest on the farm, because although she was respected and wealthy, she was still of slave descent, her sons were still barred from taking titles, and she wanted Azuka to learn the ways of these foreigners. People ruled over others not because they were better people, she said, but because they had better guns; after all, her father would not have been enslaved if his clan had been as well armed as Nwamgba's. As Nwamgba listened to her friend, she dreamed of killing Obierika's cousins with the white men's guns.

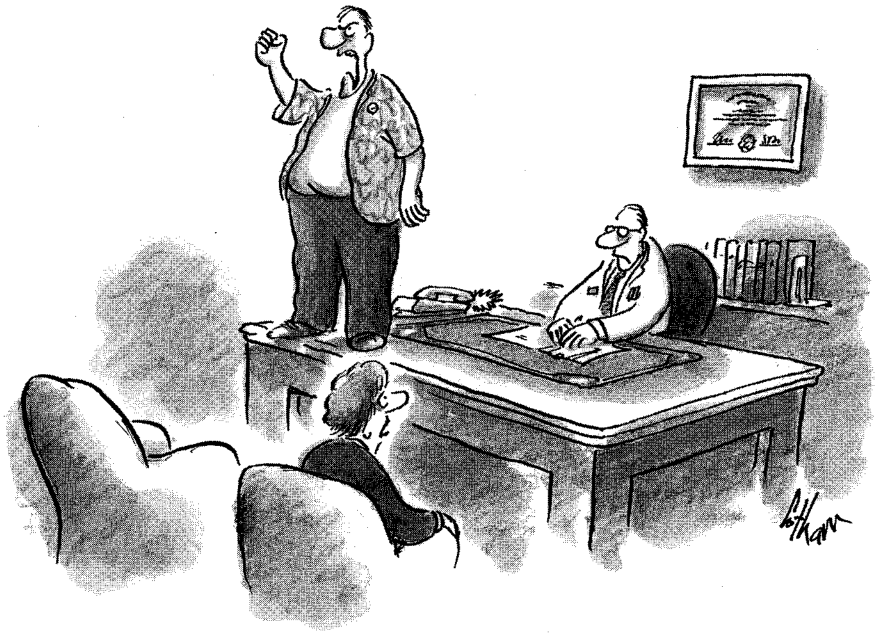
The day the white men visited her clan, Nwamgba left the pot she was about to put in her oven, took Anikwenwa and her girl apprentices, and hurried to the square. She was at first disappointed by the ordinariness of the two white men; they were harmless-looking, the color of albinos, with frail and slender limbs. Their companions were normal men, but there was something foreign about them, too: only one spoke Igbo, and with a strange accent. He said that he was from Elele, the other normal men were from Sierra Leone, and the white men from France, far across the sea. They were all of the Holy Ghost Congregation, had arrived in Onicha in 1885, and were building their school and church there. Nwamgba was the first to ask a question: Had they brought their guns, by any chance, the ones used to destroy the people of Agueke, and could she see one? The man said unhappily that it was the soldiers of the British government and the merchants of the Royal Niger Company who destroyed villages; they, instead, brought good news. He spoke about their god, who had come to the world to die, and who had a son but no wife, and who was three but also one. Many of the people around Nwamgba laughed loudly. Some walked away, because they had imagined that the white man was full of wisdom. Others stayed and offered cool bowls of water.

Weeks later, Ayaju brought another story: the white men had set up a courthouse in Onicha where they judged disputes. They had indeed come to stay. For the first time, Nwamgba doubted her friend. Surely the people of Onicha had their own courts. The clan next to Nwamgba's, for example, held its courts only during the new yam festival, so that people's rancor grew while they awaited justice. A stupid system, Nwamgba thought, but surely everyone had one. Ayaju laughed and told Nwamgba again that people ruled others when they had better guns. Her son was already learning about these foreign ways, and perhaps Anikwenwa should, too. Nwamgba refused. It was unthinkable that her only son, her single eye, should be given to the white men, never mind the superiority of their guns.

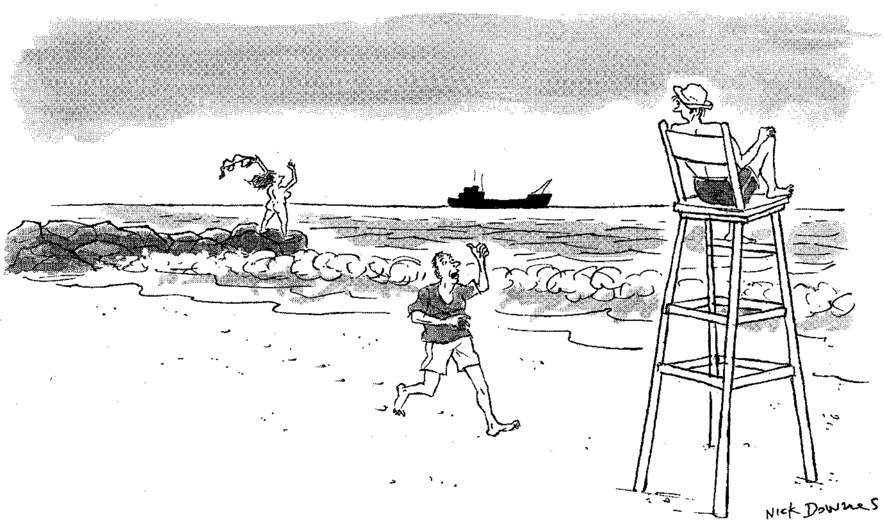
Three events, in the following years, caused Nwamgba to change her mind. The first was that Obierika's cousins took over a large piece of land and told the elders that they were farming it for her, a woman who had emasculated their dead brother and now refused to remarry, even though suitors came and her breasts were still round. The elders sided with them. The second was that Ayaju told a story of two people who had taken a land case to the white men's court; the first man was lying but could speak the white men's language, while the second man, the rightful owner of the land, could not, and so he lost his case, was beaten and locked up, and ordered to give up his land. The third was the story of the boy Iroegbunam, who had gone missing many years ago and then suddenly reappeared, a grown man, his widowed mother mute with shock at his story: a neighbor, whom his father had often shouted down at Age Grade meetings, had abducted him when his mother was at the market and taken him to the Aro slave dealers, who looked him over and complained that the wound on his leg would reduce his price. He was tied to others by the hands, forming a long human column, and he was hit with a stick and told to walk faster. There was one woman in the group. She shouted herself hoarse, telling the abductors that they were heartless, that her spirit would torment them and their children, that she knew she was to be sold to the white man and did they not know that the white man's slavery was very different, that people were treated like goats, taken on large ships a long way away, and were eventually eaten? Iroegbunam walked and walked and walked, his feet bloodied, his body numb, until all he remembered was the smell of dust. Finally, they stopped at a coastal clan, where a man spoke a nearly incomprehensible Igbo, but Iroegbunam made out enough to understand that another man who was to sell them to the white people on the ship had gone up to bargain with them but had himself been kidnapped. There were loud arguments, scuffling; some of the abductees yanked at the ropes and Iroegbunam passed out. He awoke to find a white man rubbing his feet with oil and at first he was terrified, certain that he was being prepared for the white man's meal, but this was a different kind of white man, who bought slaves only to free them, and he took Iroegbunam to live with him and trained him to be a Christian missionary.

Iroegbunam's story haunted Nwamgba, because this, she was sure, was the way Obierika's cousins were likely to get rid of her son. Killing him would be too dangerous, the risk of misfortunes from the oracle too high, but they would be able to sell him as long as they had strong medicine to protect themselves. She was struck, too, by how Iroegbunam lapsed into the white man's language from time to time. It sounded nasal and disgusting. Nwamgba had no desire to speak such a thing herself, but she was suddenly determined that Anikwenwa would speak enough of it to go to the white men's court with Obierika's cousins and defeat them and take control of what was his. And so, shortly after Iroegbunam's return, she told Ayaju that she wanted to take her son to school.

They went first to the Anglican mission. The classroom had more girls than boys, sitting with slates on their laps while the teacher stood in front of them, holding a big cane, telling them a story about a man who transformed a bowl of water into wine. The teacher's spectacles impressed Nwamgba, and she thought that the man in the story must have had powerful medicine to be able to transform water into wine, but when the girls were separated and a woman teacher came to teach them how to sew Nwamgba found this silly. In her clan, men sewed cloth and girls learned pottery. What dissuaded her completely from sending Anikwenwa to the school, however, was that the instruction was done in Igbo. Nwamgba asked why. The teacher said that, of course, the students were taught English—he held up an English primer—but children learned best in their own language and the children in the white men's land were taught in their own language, too. Nwamgba turned to leave. The teacher stood in her way and told her that the Catholic missionaries were harsh and did not look out for the best interests of the natives. Nwamgba was amused by these foreigners, who did not seem to know that one



"*Can you give him something to calm him down till the country gets straightened out?*"



"It's my wife—she's trying to lure ships to their doom!"

must, in front of strangers, pretend to have unity. But she had come in search of English, and so she walked past him and went to the Catholic mission.

Father Shanahan told her that Anikwenwa would have to take an English name, because it was not possible to be baptized with a heathen name. She agreed easily. His name was Anikwenwa as far as she was concerned; if they wanted to name him something she could not pronounce before teaching him their language, she did not mind at all. All that mattered was that he learn enough of the language to fight his father's cousins.

Father Shanahan looked at Anikwenwa, a dark-skinned, well-muscled child, and guessed that he was about twelve, although he found it difficult to estimate the ages of these people; sometimes what looked like a man would turn out to be a mere boy. It was nothing like in Eastern Africa, where he had previously worked, where the natives tended to be slender, less confusingly muscular. As he poured some water on the boy's head, he said, "Michael, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

He gave the boy a singlet and a pair of shorts, because the people of the living God did not walk around naked, and he tried to preach to the boy's mother, but she looked at him as if he were a child who did not know any better. There was something troublingly assertive about her, something he had seen in many women here; there was much potential to be harnessed if their wildness were tamed. This Nwamgba would make a marvellous missionary among the women. He watched her leave. There was a grace in her straight back, and she, unlike others, had not spent too much time going round and round in her speech. It infuriated him, their overlong talk and circuitous proverbs, their never getting to the point, but he was determined to excel here; it was the reason he had joined the Holy Ghost congregation, whose special vocation was the redemption of black heathens.

Nwamgba was alarmed by how indiscriminately the missionaries flogged students: for being late, for being lazy, for being slow, for being idle, and, once, as Anikwenwa told her, Father Lutz put metal cuffs around a girl's hands to teach her a lesson about lying, all the time saying in Igbo—for Father Lutz spoke a broken brand of Igbo—that native parents pampered their children too much, that teaching the Gospel also meant teaching proper discipline. The first weekend Anikwenwa came home, Nwamgba saw welts on his back, and she tightened her wrapper around her waist and went to the school and told the teacher that she would gouge out the eyes of everyone at the mission if they ever did that to him again. She knew that Anikwenwa did not want to go to school and she told him that it was only for a year or two, so that he could learn English, and although the mission people told her not to come so often, she insistently came every weekend to take him home. Anikwenwa always took off his clothes even before they had left the mission compound. He disliked the shorts and shirt that made him sweat, the fabric that was itchy around his armpits. He disliked, too, being in the same class as old men, missing out on wrestling contests.

But Anikwenwa's attitude toward school slowly changed. Nwamgba first noticed this when some of the other boys with whom he swept the village square complained that he no longer did his share because he was at school, and Anikwenwa said something in English, something sharp-sounding, which shut them up and filled Nwamgba with an indulgent pride. Her pride turned to vague worry when she noticed that the curiosity in his eyes had diminished. There was a new ponderousness in him, as if he had suddenly found himself bearing the weight of a heavy world. He stared at things for too long. He stopped eating her food, because, he said, it was sacrificed to idols. He told her to tie her wrapper around her chest instead of her waist, because her nakedness was sinful. She looked at him, amused by his earnestness, but worried nonetheless, and asked why he had only just begun to notice her nakedness.

When it was time for his initiation ceremony, he said he would not participate, because it was a heathen custom to be initiated into the world of spirits, a custom that Father Shanahan had said would have to stop. Nwamgba roughly yanked his ear and told him that a foreign albino could not determine when their customs would change, and that he would participate or else he would tell her whether he was her son or the white man's son. Anikwenwa reluctantly agreed, but as he was taken away with a group of other boys she noticed that he lacked their excitement. His sadness saddened her. She felt her son slipping away from her, and yet she was proud that he was learning so much, that he could be a court interpreter or a letter writer, that with Father Lutz's help he had brought home some papers that showed that their land belonged to them.

Her proudest moment was when he went to his father's cousins Okafo and Okoye and asked for his father's ivory tusk back. And they gave it to him.

Nwamgba knew that her son now inhabited a mental space that she was unable to recognize. He told her that he was going to Lagos to learn how to be a teacher, and even as she screamed—How can you leave me? Who will bury me when I die?—she knew that he would go. She did not see him for many years, years during which his father's cousin Okafo died. She often consulted the oracle to ask whether Anikwenwa was still alive, and the *dibia* admonished her and sent her away, because of course he was alive. Finally, he returned, in the year that the clan banned all dogs after a dog killed a member of the Mmangala Age Grade, the age group to which Anikwenwa would have belonged if he did not believe that such things were devilish.

Nwamgba said nothing when Anikwenwa announced that he had been appointed catechist at the new mission. She was sharpening her *aguba* on the palm of her hand, about to shave patterns into the hair of a little girl, and she continued to do so—*flick-flick-flick*—while Anikwenwa talked about winning the souls of the members of their clan. The plate of breadfruit seeds she had offered him was untouched—he no longer ate anything at all of hers—and she looked at him, this man wearing trousers and a rosary around his neck, and wondered whether she had meddled with his destiny. Was this what his chi had ordained for him, this life in which he was like a person diligently acting a bizarre pantomime?

The day that he told her about the woman he would marry, she was not surprised. He did not do it as it was done, did not consult people about the bride's family, but simply said that somebody at the mission had seen a suitable young woman from Ifite Ukpo, and the suitable young woman would be taken to the Sisters of the Holy Rosary in Onicha to learn how to be a good Christian wife. Nwamgba was sick with malaria that day, lying on her mud bed, rubbing her aching joints, and she asked Anikwenwa the young woman's name. Anikwenwa said it was Agnes. Nwamgba asked for the young woman's real name. Anikwenwa cleared his throat and said she had been called Mgbeke before she became a Christian, and Nwamgba asked whether Mgbeke would at least do the confession ceremony even if Anikwenwa would not follow the other marriage rites of their clan. He shook his head furiously and told her that the confession made by women before marriage, in which, surrounded by female relatives, they swore that no man had touched them since their husband declared his interest, was sinful, because Christian wives should not have been touched *at all.*

The marriage ceremony in the church was laughably strange, but Nwamgba bore it silently and told herself that she would die soon and join Obierika and be free of a world that increasingly made no sense. She was determined to dislike her son's wife, but Mgbeke was difficult to dislike, clear-skinned and gentle, eager to please the man to whom she was married, eager to please everyone, quick to cry, apologetic about things over which she had no control. And so, instead, Nwamgba pitied her. Mgbeke often visited Nwamgba in tears, saying that Anikwenwa had refused to eat dinner because he was upset with her, that Anikwenwa had banned her from going to a friend's Anglican wedding because Anglicans did not preach the truth, and Nwamgba would silently carve designs on her pottery while Mgbeke cried, uncertain of how to handle a woman crying about things that did not deserve tears.

Mgbeke was called "missus" by everyone, even the non-Christians, all of whom respected the catechist's wife, but on the day she went to the Oyi stream and refused to remove her clothes because she was a Christian the women of the clan, outraged that she had dared to disrespect the goddess, beat her and dumped her at the grove. The news spread quickly. Missus had been harassed. Anikwenwa threatened to lock up all the elders if his wife was treated that way again, but Father O'Donnell, on his next trek from his station in Onicha, visited the elders and apologized on Mgbeke's behalf, and asked whether perhaps Christian women could be allowed to fetch water fully clothed. The elders refused—if a woman wanted Oyi's waters, then she had to follow Oyi's rules—but they were courteous to Father O'Donnell, who listened to

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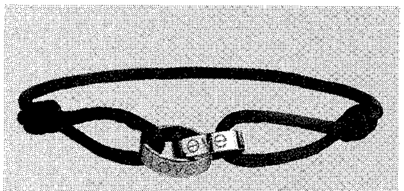

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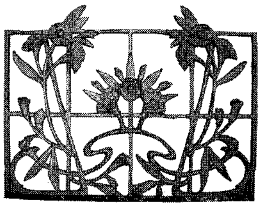

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them and did not behave like their own son Anikwenwa.

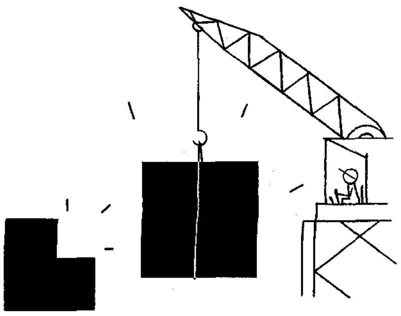
Nwamgba was ashamed of her son, irritated with his wife, upset by their rarefied life in which they treated non-Christians as if they had smallpox, but she held out hope for a grandchild; she prayed and sacrificed for Mgbeke to have a boy, because she knew that the child would be Obierika come back and would bring a semblance of sense again into her world. She did not know of Mgbeke's first or second miscarriage; it was only after the third that Mgbeke, sniffling and blowing her nose, told her. They had to consult the oracle, as this was a family misfortune, Nwamgba said, but Mgbeke's eyes widened with fear. Michael would be very angry if he ever heard of this oracle suggestion. Nwamgba, who still found it difficult to remember that Michael was Anikwenwa, went to the oracle herself, and afterward thought it ludicrous how even the gods had changed and no longer asked for palm wine but for gin. Had they converted, too?

A few months later, Mgbeke visited, smiling, bringing a covered bowl of one of those concoctions that Nwamgba found inedible, and Nwamgba knew that her chi was still wide awake and that her daughter-in-law was pregnant. Anikwenwa had decreed that Mgbeke would have the baby at the mission in Onicha, but the gods had different plans, and she went into early labor on a rainy afternoon; somebody ran in the drenching rain to Nwamgba's hut to call her. It was a boy. Father O'Donnell baptized him Peter, but Nwamgba called him Nnamdi, because he would be Obierika come back. She sang to him, and when he cried she pushed her dried-up nipple into his mouth, but, try as she might, she did not feel the spirit of her magnificent husband, Obierika. Mgbeke had three more miscarriages, and Nwamgba went to the oracle many times until a pregnancy stayed, and the second baby was born at the mission in Onicha. A girl. From the moment Nwamgba held her, the baby's bright eyes delightfully focussed on her, she knew that the spirit of Obierika had finally returned; odd, to have come back in a girl, but who could predict the ways of the ancestors? Father O'Donnell baptized the baby Grace, but Nwamgba called her Afamefuna—"my name will not be lost"—and was thrilled by the child's solemn interest in her poetry and her stories, by the teen-ager's keen watchfulness as Nwamgba struggled to make pottery with newly shaky hands. Nwamgba was not thrilled that Afamefuna was sent away to secondary school in Onicha. (Peter was already living with the priests there.) She feared that, at boarding school, the new ways would dissolve her granddaughter's fighting spirit and replace it with either an incurious rigidity, like her son's, or a limp helplessness, like Mgbeke's.

The year that Afamefuna left for secondary school, Nwamgba felt as if a lamp had been blown out in a dim room. It was a strange year, the year that darkness suddenly descended on the land in the middle of the afternoon, and when Nwamgba felt the deep-seated ache in her joints she knew that her end was near. She lay on her bed gasping for breath, while Anikwenwa pleaded with her to be baptized and anointed so that he could hold a Christian funeral for her, as he could not participate in a heathen ceremony. Nwamgba told him that if he dared to bring anybody to rub some filthy oil on her she would slap them with her last strength. All she wanted before she joined the ancestors was to see Afamefuna, but Anikwenwa said that Grace was taking exams at school and could not come home.

But she came. Nwamgba heard the squeaky swing of her door, and there was Afamefuna, her granddaughter, who had come on her own from Onicha because she had been unable to sleep for days, her restless spirit urging her home. Grace put down her schoolbag, inside of which was her textbook, with a chapter called "The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of Southern Nigeria," by an administrator from Bristol who had lived among them for seven years.

It was Grace who would eventually read about these savages, titillated by their curious and meaningless customs, not connecting them to herself until her teacher Sister Maureen told her that she could not refer to the call-and-response her grandmother had taught her as poetry, because primitive tribes did not have poetry. It was Grace who would laugh and laugh until Sister Maureen took her to detention and then summoned her father, who slapped Grace in front of the other teachers to show them how well he disciplined his children. It was Grace who would nurse a deep scorn for her father for years, spending holidays working as a maid in Onicha so as to avoid the sanctimonies, the dour certainties, of her parents and her brother. It was Grace who, after graduating from secondary school, would teach elementary school in Agueke, where people told stories of the destruction of their village by the white men with guns, stories she was not sure she believed, because they also told stories of mermaids appearing from the River Niger holding wads of crisp cash. It was Grace who, as one of a dozen or so women at the University College in Ibadan in 1953, would change her degree from chemistry to history after she heard, while drinking tea at the home of a friend, the story of Mr. Gboyega. The eminent Mr. Gboyega, a chocolate-skinned Nigerian, educated in London, distinguished expert on the history of the British Empire, had resigned in disgust when the West African Examinations Council began talking of adding African history to the curriculum, because he was appalled that African history would even be considered a subject. It was Grace who would ponder this story for a long time, with great sadness, and it would cause her to make a clear link between education and dignity, between the hard, obvious things that are printed in books and the soft, subtle things that lodge themselves in the soul. It was Grace who would begin to rethink her own schooling: How lustily she had sung on Empire Day, “God save our gracious king. Send him victorious, happy and glorious. Long to reign over us.” How she had puzzled over words like “wallpaper” and “dandelions” in her textbooks, unable to picture them. How she had struggled with arithmetic problems that had to do with mixtures, because what was “coffee” and what was “chicory,” and why did they have to be mixed? It was Grace who would begin to rethink her father’s schooling and then hurry home to see him, his eyes watery with age, telling him she had not received all the letters she had ignored, saying amen when he prayed, and pressing her lips against his forehead. It was Grace who, driving past Agueke on her way to the university one day, would become haunted by the image of a destroyed village and would go to London and to Paris and to Onicha, sifting through moldy files in archives, reimagining the lives and smells of her grandmother’s world, for the book she would write called “Pacifying with Bullets: A Reclaimed History of Southern Nigeria.” It was Grace who, in a conversation about the book with her fiancé, George Chikadibia—stylish graduate of King’s College, Lagos, engineer-to-be, wearer of three-piece suits, expert ballroom dancer, who often said that a grammar school without Latin was like a cup of tea without sugar—understood that the marriage would not last when George told her that it was misguided of her to write about primitive culture instead of a worthwhile topic like African Alliances in the American-Soviet Tension. They would divorce in 1972, not because of the four miscarriages Grace had suffered but because she woke up sweating one night and realized that she would strangle George to death if she had to listen to one more rapturous monologue about his Cambridge days. It was Grace who, as she received faculty prizes, as she spoke to solemn-faced people at conferences about the Ijaw and Ibibio and Igbo and Efik peoples of Southern Nigeria, as she wrote common-sense reports for international organizations, for which she nevertheless received generous pay, would imagine her grandmother looking on with great amusement. It was Grace who, feeling an odd rootlessness in the later years of her life, surrounded by her awards, her friends, her garden of peerless roses, would go to the courthouse in Lagos and officially change her first name from Grace to Afamefuna.



But on that day, as she sat at her grandmother’s bedside in the fading evening light, Grace was not contemplating her future. She simply held her grandmother’s hand, the palm thickened from years of making pottery. ♦

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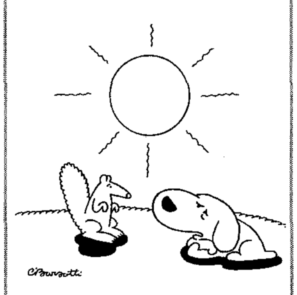

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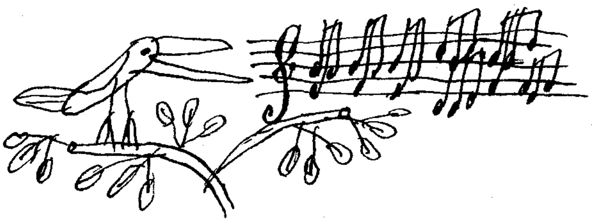


JAZZ

RELUCTANT DIVA

The unpredictable Cassandra Wilson.

BY GARY GIDDINS

In a world of niche audiences, the singer who refuses to go gently into a particular niche and stay there is at best a challenge and at worst a double agent. Cassandra Wilson, the willfully original jazz singer, has been puzzling her audiences for nearly half of her fifty-two years. Jazz radar first picked her up as a member of the nineteen-eighties collective M-Base, whose name, an acronym for Macro-Basic Array of Structured Extemporizations, signalled its attempt to promulgate new ways of thinking about improvisation. With M-Base she worked as both leader and sideman in styles from avant-garde jazz to funk. Her originality, irresistibly evident in her confidential smokehouse contralto, spurred admirers to coax her into a more glamorous career—as a star. A beautiful, voluptuous woman, with a golden complexion and an inviting smile, she has now been a star for two decades, but a reluctant one, known for her expansion of the jazz repertory and her eagerness to lose herself in an ensemble. She seems intent on maintaining the attitude of a sideman. If it isn't a team effort, where's the fun? If you can't take risks, what's the point?

Wilson's refusal to accept any single idea of how to steer her career was apparent last week with the release of a new album and two very different New York appearances. The album, "Loverly," is an unalloyed triumph, and her record company, Blue Note, is promoting it as her first album of standards in twenty years. (The claim is off by a decade—everyone seems to want to forget her 1997 record, "Rendezvous"—but still.) Singing during an air-conditioning failure at the Blue Note (the club—no relation to the record label), she gave a glowing account of the material from the album. Despite the steam-bath ambience—standards, she noted, were written before air-conditioning—she sang with open-throated, pitch-perfect vivacity, nailing every song. But two days before, at BAM, as the climax of a monthlong festival devoted to the heritage of the Mississippi Delta—Wilson is a native of Jackson, Mississippi—her intonation wavered a bit as she indulged in endless vamping grooves, sacrificing melodic concision for rhythmic repetition. Wilson has always thrived on rhythmic complexity, but her best work, including "Loverly," balances it with melodic, harmonic, and verbal nuances that transform evergreens into personal deliberations, frequently underscored with an ironic eroticism. If the BAM performance, alternately gripping and monotonous, left some in the audience bewildered, it succeeded in driving home her unconventional achievement, combining promiscuous collaboration (both engagements featured the prodigious twenty-one-year-old pianist Jonathan Batiste) and determination to rethink the jazz songbook.

Wilson's 1986 début, aptly titled "Point of View," demonstrated her novel approach to repertory, presenting her adaptations of jazz instrumentals, including works by her then frequent partner, the M-Base founder and saxophonist, Steve Coleman. In those days, mixing it up with an edgy, independent group of musicians, she appeared shy, barely articulating lyrics and making more eye contact with the band than with the audience. How long ago was that? At BAM, she remarked on how great it was to be back in Brooklyn and then blanked on the name of the street where she had lived.

In 1992, having recorded more than a dozen albums and earned little more than minor cult status, Wilson signed with Blue Note and, mentored by the label's president, Bruce Lundvall, released the career-defining opus, "Blue Light 'Til Dawn" (1993). Her attributes as a singer had long been apparent: the husky timbre, which favors her lower register; an affinity for melodic embellishments replete with sighs and moans; and a canny back-of-the-beat rhythmic attack. "Blue Light 'Til Dawn" and its Grammy-winning follow-up, "New Moon Daughter" (1996), uncovered her Mississippi roots, hardly noted in her earlier work, and freed her to revisit more recent pop songs, from the Monkees to U2, something most jazz singers were disinclined to do. She also emerged as a nonpareil blues singer—a natural, reclaiming the Delta tradition of Robert Johnson and Son House. Even today, those albums convey the excitement of an artist coming into her own, testing her mettle and rejoicing in its supple strength. At the same time, Wilson transformed herself into a knowing, confident concert artist. She came out from the wings as a knockout diva, kicking off her shoes—she *always* kicks off her shoes—and taking the microphone, the band, and the whole damned stage in hand.

It had been a decade in coming, but having found an agreeable formula, engineered in part by the producer Craig Street, Wilson seemed to recognize its limitations and to be unwilling to repeat herself. She recorded nothing for two years, and the payoff, "Rendezvous," took understatement to the point of incoherence. Then, in 1999, she released a project that had occupied her for two years: "Traveling Miles," a self-produced tribute to Miles Davis that, focussing more on Davis's jazz-fusion compositions than on his famous interpretations of standards, received mixed notices but endures as one of the most substantive

BENOÎT JACQUES

For all her starlike charisma, Wilson seems intent on maintaining the attitude of a jazz sideman. Photograph by Jesse Frohman.

of numberless Davis homages. Inspired by Davis's "Miles Runs the Voodoo Down," she wrote a marvellous lyric:

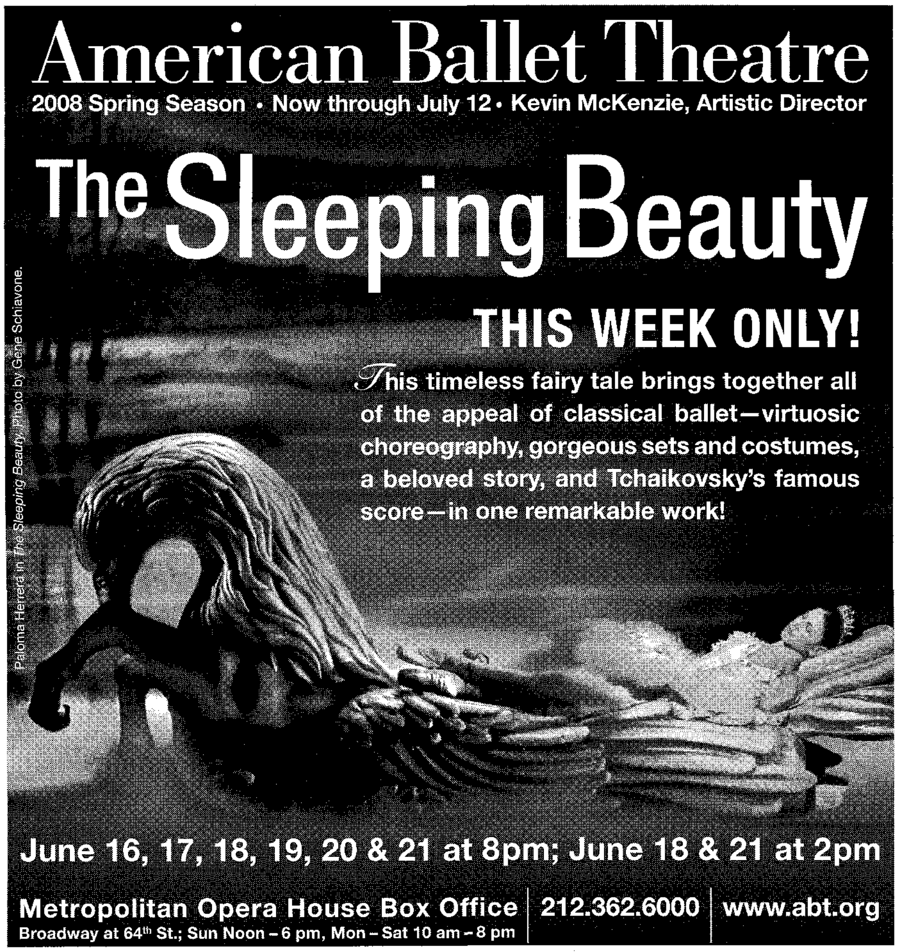
i got high john in my pocket
and mud on my shoes
walked all the way from mississippi
just to spread the news
don't care for idle conversation
i'm not your girl about town
but when it comes to making music
i run the voodoo down

Three years later, she produced what many regard as her finest album, "Belly of the Sun," which found a new body of standards in the work of Delta bluesmen, pieces from New Orleans and Brazil, and numbers by Bob Dylan, the Band, and Jimmy Webb. This album sealed her involvement with the guitarist Marvin Sewell, who had appeared on "Traveling Miles." His virtuosity on acoustic and electric guitars is enhanced by attachments that can make him sound like a violinist, a cellist, a singer, or an entire rhythm section. Wilson's bond with Sewell anchors the latest album, too. Their duet on "Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most" opens with Sewell's measured dissonances; Wilson gauges her entrance, and soon establishes a gentle, swinging beat, but the performance never completely settles into it, remaining, instead, balanced on the edge of dissonance and consonance, rubato and swing.

"Loverly" suggests excitement from the first—Jason Moran's jaunty sixteen-bar piano introduction to "Lover Come Back to Me," built on a two-note figure played over a quick shuffle rhythm—and it comes as an antidote to its immediate predecessors, "Glamoured" (2003) and "Thunderbird" (2006), which reflected production concepts more calculated than intuitive. Despite the familiarity of the album's material, there isn't much nostalgia here. For Wilson and the band, the songs aren't covered in the barnacles of previous interpretations; it's as if they had just been discovered in an old trunk. Wilson occasionally uses flat intonation as a spur, creating a moment of tension before stressing the notes and chords that define a song's arc. The band is superb throughout. Moran phrases on the beat and against it, meshes clattering chords with the rhythm section, and adds harmonic twists that knock the songs slightly askew. Lonnie Plaxico, the bassist on all but the duet selections, is strong and limber, and Herlin Riley's robust drumming is amplified by the resourceful Nigerian percussionist Lekan Babalola. (Nicholas Payton, uncredited, plays a trumpet solo on "Lover Come Back to Me," overdubbed during a sound mix.)

The album reflects the circumstances in which it was made: Wilson rented a house in Mississippi and turned it into a studio. The informality of the venture is manifest in Ray Noble's 1934 ballad, "The Very Thought of You," performed as a duet with bassist Reginald Veal. During his solo, Wilson crosses the room and resumes her vocal slightly off mike before moving back into position. In the same number, she swallows a word ("above"), a flub that in other circumstances might have occasioned another take. But in this project it's spontaneity that counts—including five seconds of silence before she sings the song's last word.

The album is full of such surprises. Meredith Willson's "Till There Was You" begins with a seventy-second prologue that seems provocatively unrelated to the song but soon triggers intricate embellishments from Wilson, including a moaning counterpoint to Sewell's solo. The introduction on "Gone with the Wind" sets up a countermelody that is sustained during the entire performance, putting a stamp on a song that had been stamped by virtually every exponent of the classic American songbook—Frank Sinatra, Sarah Vaughan, Anita O'Day, Tony Bennett, and on and on. One wonders, however, if any of her forebears could have done as well by Robert Johnson's "Dust My Broom," which Wilson personalizes and rejuvenates, laughing in one verse and clearly revelling in her rapport with the band. If making records were as effortless as "Loverly" sounds, there would be a lot more of them. ♦



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BOOKS

SHE'S NOT HERSELF

A first novel about marriage and madness.

BY JAMES WOOD

In 1835, Georg Büchner, a young sometime medical student, began to write "Lenz," a story that inhabits the schizophrenic breakdown of the eighteenth-century poet Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz. It opens simply, like a Romantic stroll: "The 20th, Lenz walked through the mountains." There is snow on the peaks and fog in the valleys. And then, seven sentences into it, something strange happens: "He felt no fatigue, except sometimes it annoyed him that he could not walk on his head." Like Lenz, we have suddenly entered an upside-down world. Lenz imagines that someone is communicating to him in hieroglyphics; he runs around manically, in the middle of the night; he thinks himself possessed of miraculous powers; he tries to bring a dead girl back to life. "When he was alone or reading, things got even worse, at times all his mental activity would fix upon a single idea; if he thought about another person, or vividly pictured them, it was as if he became that person, he grew completely confused, and yet at the same time he felt the constant urge to deliberately manipulate everything around him in his mind."

Rivka Galchen's protagonist mistakes his wife for a replica.

LARA TOMLIN

Büchner's writing (in Richard Sieburth's recent translation) so devotedly follows Lenz's stochastic thinking that it almost disappears as stable third-person narration. We are forced by the writing to share Lenz's instability. "Lenz" is often called a harbinger of European modernism, and one way in which later fiction of mental extremity develops is by replacing even that unstable third-person narrator with a highly unreliable first-person narrator, intensifying the reader's disorientation. So Dostoyevsky's underground man, in "Notes from Underground," seems to speak to us directly, while foaming with obscurities; the insane narrator of Knut Hamsun's "Hunger" roams the city streets telling awful lies; the narrator of Italo Svevo's "Confessions of Zeno" thinks he is curing himself by telling his analyst about his experiences, though all he is doing is presenting a detailed record of his insanity; in "Pale Fire," Charles Kinbote purports to offer a commentary on John Shade's poem while filling his "notes" with his own fantastical digressions; and in the book most obviously indebted to "Lenz," Thomas Bernhard's devastating novel "The Loser," the narrator labors to convince us that his friend, Wertheimer, is the real "loser," while the reader can see that the poor narrator himself hardly escapes that terrible designation.

Rivka Galchen's first novel, "Atmospheric Disturbances" (Farrar, Straus; $24), is being praised as Borgesian and Pynchonian, and certainly clutches at the frills of that lineage. (It is set partly in Argentina and makes reference to something called "the 49 Quantum," or just "the 49.") But it is more naturally seen as a contribution to the Hamsun-Bernhard tradition of tragicomic first-person unreliability. Like "Lenz," the story opens simply and then, superbly, flakes. "Last December a woman entered my apartment who looked exactly like my wife" is how Dr. Leo Liebenstein begins his story. His wife, Rema, has apparently gone missing, and this substitute has taken her place. But when the woman evinces no intention of leaving, while her putative husband begins to refer to her as an "impostress," a "simulacrum," and "the ersatz Rema," we suspect that it is Leo's rationality that has gone missing, not his wife. The rest of the novel, despite various perky plot turns, is a relentless exploration of how a man could fail to see clearly the woman he loves.

We are all afflicted at times with the cataracts of the quotidian, where routine clouds our ability to notice what we once loved about the person we live with—this is the novel's universal appeal. But it is a measure of Galchen's courage as a novelist that she insists on leading the reader to the universal only through the singular. Liebenstein is a New York psychiatrist, who, naturally, thinks that psychoanalysts are all mad: "I could never be an analyst, those people are too unpleasant, too passive-aggressively authoritarian, and yes, all crazy and out of fashion to boot." Like Svevo's narrator, who insists that the surest proof he never suffered from the Oedipus complex is that he was never cured of it, Leo has a great deal invested in his intricate forms of denial. He goes on a quest for the missing Rema, a quest that takes him to Patagonia. (Or so he tells us.) A patient of his named Harvey has also gone missing. Harvey believes that he can control the weather, and that he is a secret agent for the Royal Academy of Meteorology. According to Leo, Rema once suggested that, as part of Harvey's treatment, Leo should pretend to be an agent of the Royal Academy, too, but one of superior rank. (It would be a way of reining in Harvey's fantasies.) Leo is at first hesitant, then avidly adopts the plan. So the doctor has crossed over to the patient's side of the desk, and partakes of his insanity, while proclaiming his ability to tell the difference.

Most first-person unreliability in fiction is reliably unreliable; rather mechanically, it teaches us how to read it, how to plug its holes. Double unreliability—or unreliable unreliability—is rarer, and more interesting, because it asks much more of the reader. Galchen, a playful writer, delights in having Leo tell us, for instance, that, while Harvey is clearly delusional, the Royal Academy of Meteorology is "an institute whose existence a consensus view of reality actually would (and this surprised me at the time) affirm." In reality—that is, in our world—there is no academy by that name. But the novel wants to disturb any sense of what might constitute "a consensus view of reality," the better to depict the instabilities of a perforated mind. Leo has, perhaps, a version of Capgras syndrome, whose victims come to think that an impostor has replaced a family member or friend. But whereas, say, Richard Powers's most recent novel, "The Echo Maker," is explicitly about the phenomenology of this delusion, complete with a barrage of neurological facts, Galchen's novel more boldly denies us the comfort of a conclusive explanation. "Atmospheric Disturbances" is a novel of consciousness, not a novel *about* consciousness.

"It's you. It's you who's not yourself!" the "simulacrum" wife cries to Leo, and from time to time we glimpse the possible sources of his perturbation and grief. An outburst about his father suggests that Leo may never have recovered from paternal abandonment: "A foolish friend once said to me, *You could place an ad in the paper, looking for your father.* One of the ugliest, stupidest things I'd ever heard anyone say. I wasn't looking for my father. I had no need to see him or speak to him or know where he was or what he was or wasn't wearing. Really, I barely remembered him, and I had no reason to believe that he was a particularly interesting or intelligent or good-looking man." A more conventional writer would let us use the flare of anger to get our bearings on Leo. But Leo is too far gone for that, and we must follow him deep into his errancy. Galchen has a knack for taking a thread and fraying it, so that a sentence never quite ends up where you expect. Here Leo is talking about his desperation, as the husband of a woman who has been "replaced." We begin the sentence thinking that it might throw some light on his mind, but end it in darkened counsel:

> That was the stage of loss I was in then I suppose, like the first days after someone dies, when you bend down to pick up every piece of lint, and you wonder what the dead person, when you meet her next, might have to say about her death (or about lint), and you worry, a little bit, about how that is going to be a very awkward conversation, the conversation with the recently dead.

Galchen can take the slightest observation of Leo's and warp it, to reveal lunatic undulations: "I don't know if Harvey actually had one arm notably longer than the other, but he gave off that impression." His language is strange, pungent, dangerously ripe: "As the simulacrum sleep sighed, her whole thorax centimetered out against me—then receded." Walking into a pastry shop, Leo takes a quick, fantastical inventory of the people in it, and then:

> "What did you say?" someone said maybe to me.
>
> "Nothing," I said to almost no one.

Leo becomes interested in the work of a member of the Royal Academy of Meteorology named Tzvi Gal-Chen, who has done research on the difficulties of translating Doppler radar data. The arcana of meteorology allow Galchen, who has an M.D. from the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, to explore some neat scientific metaphors. She plays on the Doppler effect (just as the Doppler effect is a change in the observed frequency of a sound or electromagnetic wave, so Leo's "observation" of his wife has been subject to a kind of analogous redshift) and coins, for Leo's haunting by his wife's double, the phrase "Dopplerganger effect." But this postmodern jauntiness too legibly packages her themes, and undermines her novelistic commitment to the mysteriousness of Leo's despair. What is strongest in the novel is the delicacy with which Galchen evokes the bewildering randomness of Leo's visionary insanity; Leo is at his most moving not when he conveniently pleases the reader with explication but when he turns away from the reader, to wash in his own opacity.

If the Dopplerganger effect is too cute, the selection of the author's father's name as a character in the novel is awfully risky. The Sebald-like reproduction of a photograph of what must be the Galchen family is a mistake—it comes off as both whimsical and coercive—but, for all that, Galchen manages to make her novel a kind of tribute to her father, an academic meteorologist who died in 1994, in his fifties. She does so by blending Leo's fiercely denied grief for his lost father with her own, more recessed mourning. Thus, in the passage where Leo denies that he was looking for his father, the book is enacting not a double but a triple unreliability, since the author herself has joined the resistant chorus. (What, me? Looking for *my* father?) Galchen uses the presence of her family name in the novel paradoxically: on the one hand, it anchors the narrative by pointing us outside of it, to the writer; on the other, it reminds us that the book is an authorial concoction. "Gal-Chen therapy language made its way into our apartment, first teasingly, but after a while who could say?" Leo recalls, of his and his wife's growing interest in Tzvi Gal-Chen. "When Rema and I disagreed, I'd invoke our meteorologist: 'Dr. Gal-Chen prefers the green wool,' 'Dr. Gal-Chen says no to imitation Nilla Wafers.' " Dr. Gal-Chen is also, of course, Rivka Galchen, M.D., the Dr. Galchen who pulls the real—or "real"—strings here.

"Lenz" and "Hunger" and "The Loser" are short works, in part because first-person lunacy is a stretch. "Atmospheric Disturbances" is too long by forty or fifty pages. But Galchen has written an original and sometimes affecting novel, one that knows how to move from the comic to the painful, as the antic twilight of Leo's insanity gives way to the darkest night. Perhaps the novel's most annihilating sentence is this one: "So I hung up the telephone, not listening to whatever it was the double was saying to me, probably just listing more memories." Recited memories are what a marriage has, and behind the flippant cruelty of Leo's madness we can hear a wife trying to coax a husband back to shared normality, back to a marriage that once was, back to "a consensus view of reality." ♦

BOOKS

AN UPSTATE SAGA

Ethan Canin's many-layered novel.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

From the first pages of Ethan Canin's new novel, "America America" (Random House; $27), we feel in safe hands; the prospects are panoramic, and the prose, in the author's preferred first-person mode ("It's easier to write when you have a voice," he has said), is ruminative, ominous, and all set to confide a story. The narrator, Corey Sifter, is a fifty-year-old journalist and the publisher of the *Speaker-Sentinel*, a surviving independent newspaper in a town called Saline, an hour south of Buffalo and twenty miles east of Lake Erie. Corey has just attended, on a Saturday in late September, 2006, as "the smell of rotting apples was drifting up from the meadow," the funeral of Senator Henry Bonwiller, a local product who in 1972 made a strong but thwarted run at the Democratic nomination for the Presidency of the United States. Bonwiller was eighty-nine, and had been out of politics for twenty-eight years. The funeral is well attended, though hints of two old scandals, alluded to as "Anodyne Energy" and "Silverton Orchards," shadow the graveside tributes to "the greatest liberal member of the United States Congress since Sam Rayburn." One elderly couple linger as the sod is being laid on Bonwiller's grave, and the man, with a carved cane and "that certain kind of roughly determined American face that you see less and less often around here," kneels and weeps. Corey recognizes him: "There was no one else alive now who knew." Thereby hangs the tale.

And a complicated, many-layered epic of class, politics, sex, death, and social history it is, shuttling between the twenty-first-century present and the crowded events of 1971-72, with thorough retrospectives of the narrator's education and romantic life and the region's development as the fiefdom of a single family, the Metareys. Eoghan Metarey and his father were penniless Scots immigrants who in 1890 opened a hardware store and by 1900 held a firm grip on the area's wealth of hardwood forests and granite and limestone quarries. Eoghan and his younger son, Liam, successively administered the family fortune out of a "twenty-four-room brick and stone Edwardian manor" called Aberdeen West, which occupied "the apex of a hundred-thousand-acre triangle of land." Not only that, but the streets and houses of Saline ("which if you're an old-timer rhymes with *malign*, and if you're a newcomer, with *machine*") were "almost entirely built and owned" by the Metareys. At sixteen, Corey, the son of a self-educated and well-regarded plumber, is summoned by Liam to come and work at Aberdeen West. (An unassuming tycoon, Liam comes knocking at the Sifters' back porch; his wife shops locally and his two daughters attend the local high school, "like all the rest of us.") Corey's story becomes part "David Copperfield" and part "An American Tragedy," with less suspense than either. We know from the outset that Corey has survived and prospered, and how much tragedy can attach to a senator who lives to be eighty-nine?

Ethan Canin

PAUL HAMLYN

Like Dickens, Canin has an unabashed fantastic streak. "Emperor of the Air," his first and best-known book, a collection of delicately soulful short stories, contains much weird behavior: a mild-mannered retired high-school teacher creeps into the night to poison his neighbor's trees with a jar of voracious red insects; another retiree stares at fish in the local aquarium all day and reads poetry while his wife hallucinates that a man is at her window; two adult sisters cope with their mother's incorrigible shoplifting; a boy stows away in the trunk of his golf-mad father's car and shouts out during the man's back-seat lovemaking. As in Sherwood Anderson's "Winesburg, Ohio," unfulfilled longings twist conformity out of shape. In "America America," Christian Metarey, one of the teen-age sisters, appears on the roof outside Corey's window and, climbing by moonlight, leads him eighty feet up into a giant pine tree, and, toward the end of the novel, Corey's father, nearing ninety, bends down and with a key scratches two sentences by Karl Marx into the wet concrete of a huge mall under construction. Such actions seem more emblematic than plausible. The characters, especially young and innocent Corey, struggle through a fog of imperfect and fitful revelation; after thirty years of hindsight, the narrator is still groping to understand the novel's central events.

How unambiguously, in contrast, Dreiser moves in inexorable, laboriously detailed linear fashion through the interlocking steps of his own upstate tragedy, shining a glaring light of sympathy upon the motives, intentions, and hopes not only of his principals but of the secondary characters who enforce society's unforgiving will—the doctor who denies Roberta an abortion, the district attorney who leads the hunt for Clyde and then his legal prosecution, the clergyman whom Clyde's mother sends to her condemned son in a vain quest for a mitigating circumstance that will save his life. A ponderous weight of authorial omniscience and compassion conveys the reality—single, one-shot, claustrophobically limited—of life itself. So, too, with the other naturalists, from Jack London to Edith Wharton, of a century ago. Canin, contrariwise, pieces together, in mostly short takes, an airy collage of imperfect memory and fleeting impression, as Corey's recollection of a bygone misfortune, half-comprehendingly witnessed in his adolescence, keeps reverting to pleased contemplation of his bourgeois present.

Of the book's many strands, it is his boyhood in worker housing, under the protection of his two admirable parents and the patronage of the Metareys, that comes across most warmly, and the political strand, generating national headlines, that seems thinnest and least persuasive. Canin carefully wedges his fictional Senator Bonwiller into an election year, 1972, when, in fact, a Democratic field including a fading Hubert Humphrey, an allegedly weepy Edmund Muskie, and a glowering George Wallace yielded the nomination to George McGovern, who lost to an incumbent Richard Nixon in one of the worst defeats in the history of Presidential contests. Nixon, who figures in this novel as a sinister background of fathomless conspiracy, was a touching character in Canin's short story "Vins Fins," which appeared in this magazine and presented political drama as it usually is, surreally fighting for our attention in a stew of personal and domestic happenstance. Born in 1960, Canin has done his homework. To verify Bonwiller's substance as a near-President, he lists the notables in attendance at a campaign reception at Aberdeen West:

> George Meany was there, and Carl Stokes, and Averell Harriman, and Senator Kennedy and Senator Mansfield and even Senator Humphrey. So were Arthur Schlesinger and Betty Friedan, and the famous young journalist David Halberstam, who'd just written a book called *The Best and the Brightest*. . . . G. V. Trawbridge [fictional] was in the crowd, too, and I assume now that both men must have agreed to take everything on deep background. I saw Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Shirley Chisholm, also, and even though now I can remember all these names and faces so clearly, the truth is that on the afternoon itself all but Trawbridge and Humphrey and Kennedy had to be pointed out to me. . . . But I can also say that without any prompting I sensed instantly that there was a new sort of stature in the room.

Though it gives an old-timer like me pleasure to picture George Meany and Betty Friedan in affable discourse, to anyone under forty these names can't spark much electricity and, in any case, paradoxically weaken Aberdeen West's claims on the imagination. Corey, with a brand-new driver's license in his pocket, drives Bonwiller around, but the Senator, away from a microphone, is taciturn and, until his downfall, remains pretty much a cipher. Though Corey's father remembers him as "the best friend the working men of this country have ever had," it is hard to believe that Liam Metarey, committing his heart and resources to the campaign, does not see the feet of clay so easily visible to, among others, his daughter Clara.

In Corey's perspective, his patron and mentor, for all his generosity, also remains a bit remote and blank, coming to life mainly in this endearing glimpse:

> If anything broke, anywhere on the estate, he tried to fix it himself; and if he couldn't fix it, he dismantled it, salvaging it for parts, which he filed in the work barn in a ceiling-high collection of labeled drawers—themselves salvaged, it seemed, from some country auction. It was as though he were two men: the Liam Metarey who owned a third of Carrol Township and spoke with the governor just about every week, and another man entirely—a determined, hardscrabble Scotsman trying to scrape out a living on rocky land. His toolshed looked like the barn of an ingenious and frugal farmer.

This paternalistic tinkerer presides over a considerably dishevelled household—a wife who drinks and flies a biplane, a son who quits school and enters the Vietnam-era military, and two daughters who compete for Corey's attention in contrasting, though equally unbalanced, styles. But their collective eccentricities feel halfhearted and joyless compared with those in "Emperor of the Air," especially those of the family in "American Beauty," whose jaunty dysfunction carries on guilt-free, with no burden of dynastic responsibility or need to further a novel's plot. In Carrol Township, their bohemian ilk, the Millburys, dwell in the "failed farmland" ten miles north of Saline, in a trailer on the edge of a bog; the man of the house has dropped out of a job as a chemist at DuPont, the mother paints, all six children are homeschooled, and, to make ends meet, the family grows and sells raspberries and blueberries. However, a daughter, Trieste, is bright enough to win an internship with the *Speaker-Sentinel*, and, cantankerous and ill-dressed as she is, gives the newspaper's publisher an opportunity for mentorship and, guardedly, friendship. Their conversations, often about the ancient Bonwiller affair, form another of the book's strands, though Trieste is less a character than a case study: "I could hear in her northern hillbilly voice what I later came to learn was her father's social opposition. A thin flow of bile mixed with a radical amusement and a fierce, uncooked intelligence, nourished over decades of contemplation. Class upon class."

The novel's best characters, the ones we come to know well enough to care about, are women: the narrator's concerned, loving mother, and the Senator's mistress and victim, JoEllen Charney. "Victim" only in a sense: it is someone else, it turns out, who allows this inconvenient female—like Dreiser's Clyde Griffiths with Roberta Alden—to die. Corey sees her only once, waiting alone in a restaurant, "a young woman in a flowered hat and dark glasses who looked like what I imagined a schoolteacher on vacation might look like." Among the male characters, Corey's father grows another dimension as a widower, and his former neighbor and best friend, Mr. McGowar, whose voice has been destroyed by fifty years of inhaling stone dust, makes a big splash on the page with the words he writes out in capital letters. One thinks of what an Upton Sinclair would have made of Mr. McGowar—a handicapped former quarryman, a symbol of industry's pitiless exploitation—but Canin plays his phonetic misspellings for laughs and lets him live cheerfully to the age (at last sighting) of ninety-five. Canin writes "America America" in various tenses—present and past—and styles, from staccato to stentorian. Much of the second half of the book feels like an after-dinner speech, a rumbling aftermath of Bonwiller's "tumble," studded with reverberant quotations, including Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" in its totality. The staccato style, sometimes merely hasty and melodramatic, is effectively internalized as Corey's mother suddenly collapses and dies:

> Then comes the first blow. The feeling in her arm dropping away. A shudder over the shoulder and scalp. Then the swooning. The floor pitching. She tries to right herself. Grabs the counter. Use the other arm, silly. Lift! Silly girl! Up, Anna Bainbridge. Up! The floor, wrapping her. All over, how can it do that?

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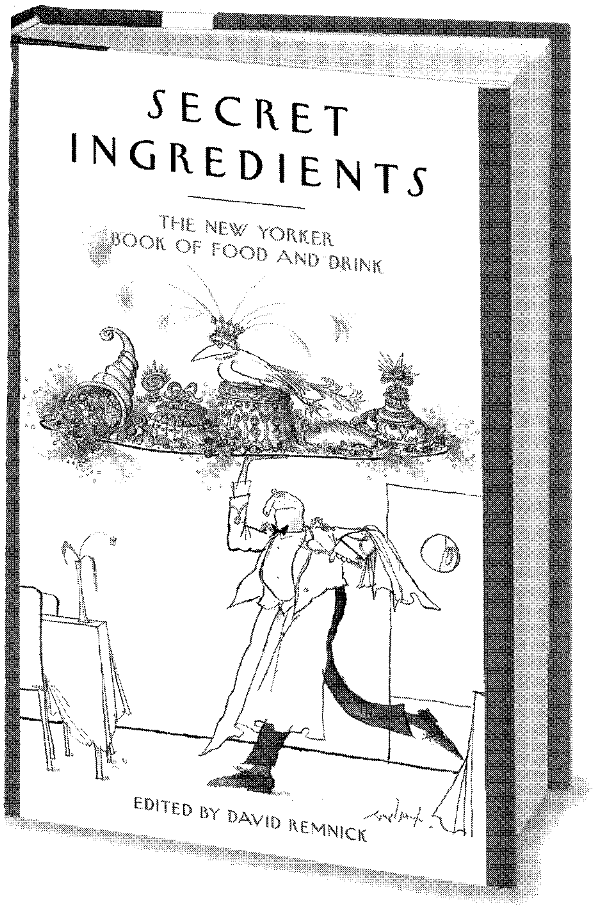

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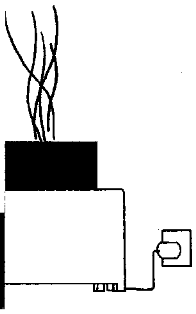
uman trafficking, protection rackets, narcotics smuggling, state-sanctioned embezzlement, assassinations, and even old-fashioned political corruption are practiced today on a scale previously unimaginable. Without "some form of global governance," Glenny grimly concludes, the prosperous West's appetites will insure the continued existence of the flat world's sordid and dangerous flipside.



Attachment, *by Isabel Fonseca (Knopf; $23.95).* A cultured British couple who pride themselves on unconventionality decamp to an island in the Indian Ocean, intending to continue their careers (his, advertising; hers, a women's-health column) via the Internet. Then the wife opens a smutty letter to her husband, apparently from a lover. Rather than endure this affair, after twenty-three years of marriage, she goes online masquerading as her husband, and initiates an X-rated e-mail relationship with her rival. The plot strains credulity, but Fonseca's vivisection of matrimony and desire is cruelly exacting. She likens pornography to a bullfight, at first "mesmerizing, upsetting, with scattered moments of surprising grace," yet ultimately disappointing. "How in the world," she wonders, "could it be boring and arousing at the same time?"

The Sorrows of an American, *by Siri Hustvedt (Henry Holt; $25).* "I'm lost," a patient tells her psychiatrist in Hustvedt's fourth novel. "I'm cold. I'm all alone." She might be speaking for all the characters in this sombre meditation on the isolation of urban professionals, in which daily routines are nothing but "pillars in an architecture of need," erotic love is ephemeral, and friendship is the only source of consolation in a post-9/11 New York where everyone is always having nightmares. Hustvedt's interest in the ways in which language can form both a bridge and a barrier between individuals leads her into digressions on Plato, Kierkegaard, and theories of psychoanalysis. This didactic turn has the unfortunate effect of making her plot—stories of loss and disappointment connected only tenuously through the character of the psychiatrist—start to seem almost beside the point.

DANCING

DOUBLE STORY

Alexei Ratmansky's steps.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Alexei Ratmansky's new piece for New York City Ballet, "Concerto DSCH," to Shostakovich's Second Piano Concerto (the initials are the composer's, in the German form), opens like a beach party, with dancers in swimsuitlike costumes doing sporty maneuvers. Then the lights dim, the concerto's lovely slow movement begins, and a couple—Wendy Whelan and Benjamin Millepied—who had danced together happily during the first movement begin to see life differently. Facing him, she bourrées backward; he runs toward her, falls to his knees, and reaches for her hand, which she withdraws. Finally, she lets him partner her, but their duet has a note of strangeness and difficulty. He turns her by her armpits, lifts her by her knees. At the end, they exit in opposite directions. Then the ensemble comes back, and surf's up again. We get speed, gaiety, and virtuosity, to the end of the piece. The three movements, though sequential, are not really a series (cheer, trouble, cheer restored), or that's not how they sit, later, in the mind. They are a layering, with the slow movement coming as a sort of under- or over-thought about the other two: a cloud across the sun. Such ambiguity is the native language of ballet, and in "Concerto DSCH" Ratmansky speaks it again, telling us the old, true, double story.

His history is itself double. Now thirty-nine, Ratmansky grew up in Kiev and was trained at the Bolshoi school, in Moscow, but, to his disappointment, the Bolshoi did not hire him. (He is not a beauty; he looks like the rest of us.) He went to the Ukrainian National Ballet. After the fall of the U.S.S.R., he moved to the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, and then to the Royal Danish Ballet, in Copenhagen. This westward journey changed him. He learned to dance the American and European repertory, which is different from the Bolshoi's earnest product—more self-critical. He had started choreographing when he was in school, but in Copenhagen he worked harder at it, and began to get commissions. (By now, he has created forty-one ballets.) In 2003, he went back to the Bolshoi, to make a ballet, and while he was there he was invited to become the artistic director of the company. To some of the Bolshoi's senior dancers, this was an unpleasant surprise. In their eyes, as Ratmansky told Anna Kisselgoff, of the *Times*, he was "someone from Denmark, and where is that?" But the Bolshoi was in trouble at that time. For thirty years, from 1964 to 1995, Yuri Grigorovich, a maker of big, blaring Soviet ballets, had held the company in his grip. After him, four directors came and went, fast. When Ratmansky was asked to be the next one, the Russian Federation was twelve years old—the country was supposed to be modern—and its most famous ballet troupe still only knew how to dance Grigorovich's beefy numbers. The management wanted someone to bring the company up to date. What better candidate than a Bolshoi-trained choreographer who had spent almost a decade working in the West?

Ratmansky took the job in 2004, and began acquiring Western repertory: works by George Balanchine, Léonide Massine, John Neumeier, Flemming Flindt, Christopher Wheeldon, Twyla Tharp. A number of the company's stars did not want to do these peculiar ballets, and wouldn't try, so Ratmansky began featuring younger dancers who did want to try—a violation of hierarchy that made him even less popular. He has said that his administrative duties (by which he probably means a good many fights as well) took up more than two-thirds of his time. He was now an internationally respected choreographer, but he had little opportunity to choreograph. His contract with the Bolshoi ran through 2008. He did not seek to renew it. He is still the director of the company, and later this year he will mount two ballets there, but on New Year's he will go independent.

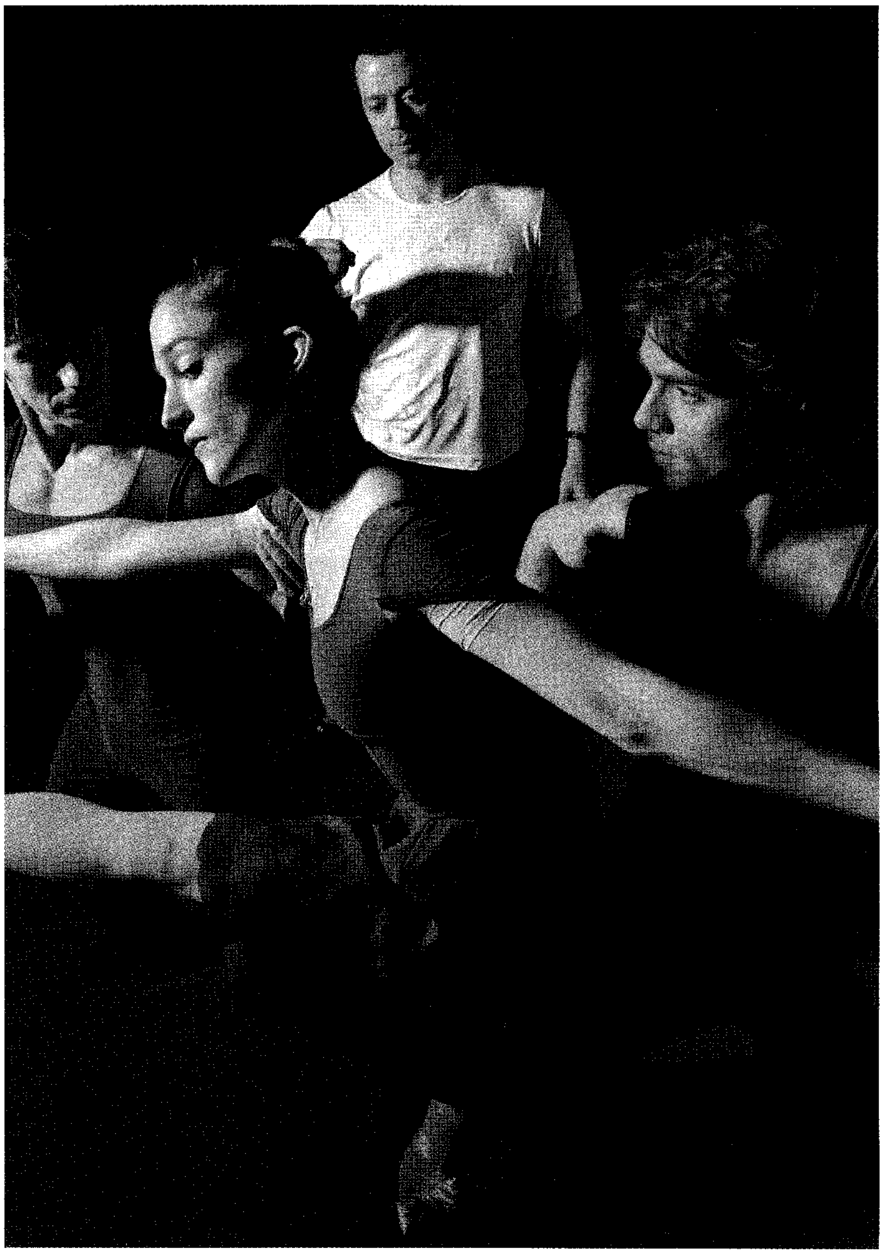
The emotional richness of "Concerto DSCH" is not new to Ratmansky's work. In 2006, he created another piece for N.Y.C.B.: "Russian Seasons," about time and growth and aging. At the end, ten dancers lay down in their graves. But for much of the ballet these stylized peasants were knockabout, comic characters, and the shift of meanings made the piece especially piercing. Earlier this year, we saw two more new ballets by him, each created for a beloved Russian ballerina. For the State Ballet of Georgia, now headed by the former Bolshoi star Nina Ananiashvili, he made "Bizet Variations," in which three couples flirted and changed partners and got back together—a light, Frenchy business, it seemed, until the conclusion, when Ananiashvili, one of the women, knelt on the stage alone and put her face in her hands, inviting us into a sober reflection on what had happened. For a pickup company that the Kirov's Diana Vishneva brought to New York in February, he choreographed "Pierrot Lunaire," to the famous Schoenberg score. This was a series of twenty-one sweet, toylike scenes for Pierrot and his friends, but over the whole piece there hovered the melancholy suggested by the music. Everything Ratmansky creates has a secret inside it.

That is one of his two great gifts. The other is his handling of the academic ballet vocabulary. He is faithful to the classroom steps, even the small, dainty ones that are apparently too fussy for cutting-edge choreographers. (His seven years at the Royal Danish troupe, with its treasury of nineteenth-century ballets, may have confirmed him in this loyalty.) But he, too, is rethinking ballet technique. His work is full of tilts and angles and dynamism, above all in the women's legs, the most tiltable component of dance. (Sometimes his women appear without tights. He likes those legs.) As a result, his pas de deux are enthralling. So is his ensemble choreography, which combines clarity with an almost showy complexity. Dancers move in canon; groups split open, bisected by a soloist. A circle doesn't turn alone; it has another circle inside it, turning the other way. Some of his work I have seen only on video, which is normally the kiss of death to any group dance, and, even there, his stage sends off sparks.

There are a few things that I would wish for in Ratmansky's work. Much of the choreography he produced in Russia was satirical, or sort of: revisions of old Soviet ballets. I hope that this won't be a trend. Satire narrows him. His psychological acuity deserves a wider scope. Also, he seems to have picked up some bad habits from Jerome Robbins, or maybe they're all his own, but he is very interested in the doings of the supposedly carefree young. Sometimes, when he's showing us a pas de deux—for example, that sobering duet in "Concerto DSCH"—he will have some of those young folk sitting on the floor at the side of the stage, watching. What are they doing there, hugging their knees and probably thinking about what they're going to have for dinner? With people looking on, the pas de deux—the center of meaning, in most ballets—is deprived of its isolation and abstraction, and hence, in large measure, of its emotional authority. This practice may be a product of Ratmansky's honesty, his anti-Soviet need to moderate any claim on our emotions, to distance himself from poster art. But he's not in Russia anymore. He should just go ahead and make the claim, and see what happens. Finally, I wish he would go down a darker road. If his ballets have secret meanings, it is usually the sombre meaning that is the secret, and the happy doings the surface. In an older ballet of his, "Middle Duet" (1998), the arrangement is reversed. The ostensible drama is a tortured duet between a man and a woman, qualified, in Ratmansky's way, by a kind of clipped, objective tone. (At the end, the dancers flop unceremoniously to the floor. They may be dead. On the other hand, they may just be tired of dancing, or of each other.) It would be nice to get that kind of thing again: the tragedy layered over the comedy. Aging may push him in that direction, but I would like to see it before he is aged.

But whatever he does, he has shown us more wisdom and craft than we have seen in a while. For the past twenty-five years, ballet has been looking like a stepchild—either simplistically pretty, trying to please, or simplistically tough, telling prettiness to go to Hell. Some people, in response, have pronounced ballet dead; others have said that this special dance form, with its short roster of geniuses, often goes into downtime, especially when a reigning genius is removed. (In the five years between 1983 and 1988—that is, when the freeze began—all the great ballet choreographers of the mid-century died: Balanchine, Antony Tudor, Frederick Ashton.) We were advised to wait, and we have waited, a long time. The dancers looked cold and cautious; when a good ballet appeared, it was usually by a crossover choreographer, someone who started in modern dance.

Today, amazingly, ballet seems to be budding again. N.Y.C.B. has recently fielded some wonderful young dancers, and they are burning up the stage. More important (because there are almost always good dancers), we are suddenly seeing a few truly artistic dancemakers: first, Christopher Wheeldon, and now Ratmansky. Wheeldon was the resident choreographer of N.Y.C.B. from 2001 until early this year. Ratmansky was asked to succeed him. He declined—reportedly, he had too many competing assignments—but N.Y.C.B. has presented most of what America has seen of his work. Wheeldon founded his own company last year—it will return to City Center in the fall—and Ratmansky says that if all goes well he will be looking for an apartment in New York. Don't get excited, but there's hope. ♦



Ratmansky (rear) with dancers from N.Y.C.B. Photograph by Elinor Carucci.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Lee Hall and Edward Albee on artistic vision.

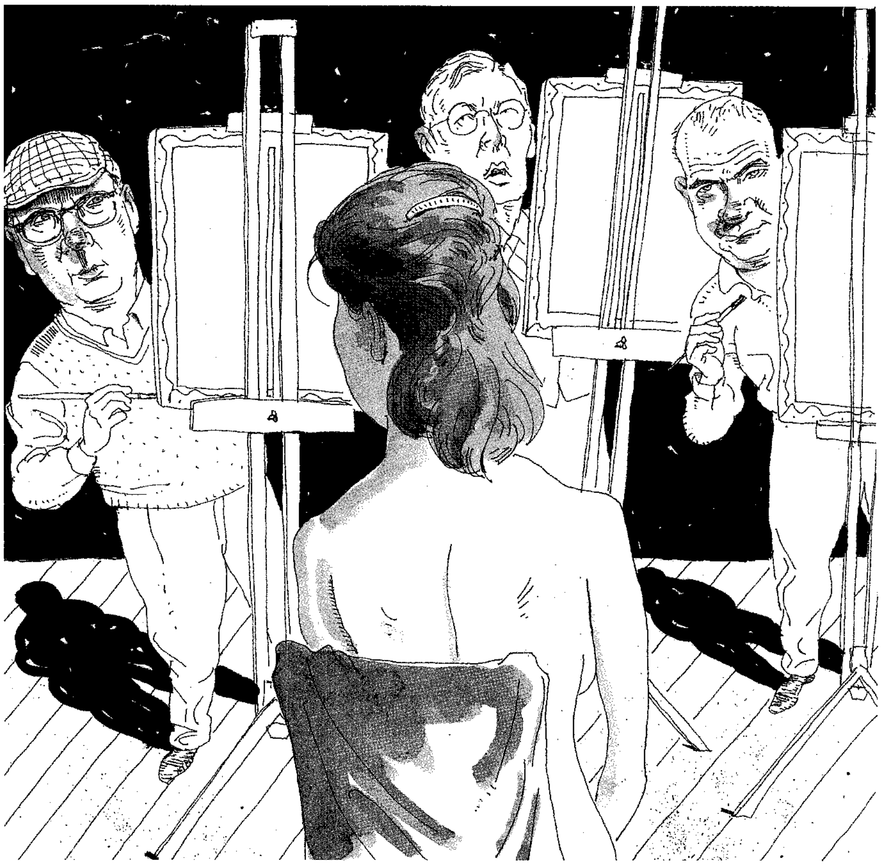
BY JOHN LAHR

"Culture is for living, and art should be about taking part," Lee Hall writes in the introduction to his superb play "The Pitmen Painters" (well directed by Max Roberts, at the National's Cottesloe Theatre, in London). Set in hidebound prewar Britain, the play tells the rousing, poignant, and true story of a group of Northumbrian coal miners in the thirties and forties, whose Tuesday-night art class turned them into the celebrated Ashington Group, and whose influential 1936 exhibition was the first show entirely of working-class artists in British history.

At that time, more than a million British miners were working ten-hour shifts for two pounds and six shillings a week. When Hall's men first assemble in their hut for a Workers' Educational Association class—an art-history lecturer, Robert Lyon (Ian Kelly), has been recruited from Durham University—making art is the last thing on their minds. "We just want to be able to look at a picture and know what it means," the saturnine Oliver Kilbourn (Christopher Connel) tells Lyon, who arrives with his arms full of slides and his mouth full of polished vowels. The scene is a bravura vaudeville of miscommunication. Lyon invokes art-historical references—the Renaissance, the Sistine Chapel, Leonardo da Vinci, chiaroscuro—which fall on deaf ears; he is frustrated, then flummoxed. The minds of the miners are not so much closed books as empty pages. They're hungry for knowledge; what they lack is the tools for the job. In their intellectual vacuum, every name, every word, every association that Lyon deploys is lost. "The point of painting is how it makes you feel," he says finally, trying to settle an argument about the meaning of art. To the literal-minded miners, this statement makes no sense. Sculpture is one thing, Jimmy Floyd (David Whitaker) tells him. "But feeling a picture—it's just ganna be flat, man."

"Rough work, honorable or not, takes the life out of us," John Ruskin said—this line is the epigram to the biography, by William Feaver, that inspired the play—and the miners' blankness makes the point. "May I ask you, have you ever been to a gallery?" Lyon says. "We've never been anywhere. We're pitmen," one of them answers. With no critical idiom to rely on, the only way for the miners to learn about art—to understand the concepts of form, color, composition, perspective—is to make it. At first, they bridle at the idea of painting their own drab world. "Nebody wants to see people hewing coal or folks chained to cogs or any of that malarkey," Jimmy says. But gradually, beginning with linocuts and progressing to paint, the miners record the atmospheres and occasions of their daily life: the soccer matches, the dog races, the street corners, the union meetings, the pub, the sickbed. The revelation of their inner landscape is as exhilarating to them as the vigor of their primitive approach is to the British art scene, which soon takes them up. Oliver, the most gifted among them, stands before the class to discuss his first painting assignment and admits that he has worked through the night, overcome by a rush of feeling. "I was shaking—literally shaking—'cos for the first time in me life, I'd really achieved something," he says. "I had made something that was mine. . . . And I felt like for those few hours there—I was my own boss."

As each miner discusses his work and the work of the famous artists he has come to know, the paintings are projected onto screens behind him. The trope turns the play into a cleverly dramatized seminar on seeing: abstraction vs. representation, technique vs. quality of expression, vision vs. decoration. Over time—and this is one of the play's most delicious pleasures—the students acquire a critical vocabulary and a point of view. In one class, when Lyon challenges Jimmy's



Northumbrian miners become celebrated artists in "The Pitmen Painters."

JOHN CUNEO

attempt at abstraction—"It's not really coming from you," he says—the newly minted painter shoots back, "Where else is it coming from? Hey, I dragged this up from my subconscious on the allotment during an air raid, for chrissakes." Jimmy goes on, "Oh, it's all right if Picasso does a blob, or some posh bloke from London does a blob, but when I de one it doesn't come from me."

"Real art is communal and active," Hall writes. But the notion of community is tested here by the realities of individual attainment. A collector and art patron, Helen Sutherland (Phillippa Wilson), offers to pay Oliver an annual stipend so that he can leave the colliery and devote himself to painting. "I'm throwing you a lifeline," she tells him. But Oliver can't seize the opportunity. To take it up would mean cutting himself off from his group. "They're my family," he says. "They're everything I've got." It would also mean going unarmed into an alien world. "I haven't got the language," he tells her. "I am who I am. . . . I'd have to be something else." He can't and won't reinvent himself. Oliver's failure to move on is the tragedy of the class system, which inflicts a scar of inferiority so deep that half a century of the welfare state has not been enough to eradicate it from British life. Hall dramatized this point in a sentimental way in "Billy Elliot." "The Pitmen Painters" is a more complex and better told story, but its pathos and its pleasure follow the same motif: in the shuffle of their working life, the miners find a dance.

By contrast, the great Russian-born American sculptress Louise Nevelson (1899-1988), who is the heroine of "Edward Albee's Occupant" (a Signature Theatre Company production, at the Peter Norton Space, directed by Pam MacKinnon), was from an early age lumbered by a sense of her own superiority. "I knew I was going to become somebody very special. No . . . that I *was* somebody very special," Albee's Nevelson (Mercedes Ruehl), summoned from the grave to display her grandiosity, tells her interviewer (Larry Bryggman). Inevitably, she found no community in which she felt she belonged—not as a Jewish child from a shtetl growing up in Maine, nor, later, as the cosseted wife of a rich Manhattan businessman. "What do you do? You don't fit in—so you make everything fit to you," she says. Finding no congenial habitat in life, Nevelson took up residence in her imagination—the landscape of her assemblages. She made her art out of junk and lumber, the two commodities in which her father had traded. He turned them into cash; she turned them into something immortal. "I feel that what people call by the word 'scavenger' is really a resurrection," she once said.

While she gave life to objects, Nevelson's sensational narcissism prevented her from giving much life to the world around her. She was a faithless wife and a miserable mother, farming out her son, Myron, to her parents to rear, though not before her inattention caused him nearly to drown at the beach and be hit by her car. He was delayed in learning language, because she talked to him so little. "You're going to be *yourself*," she tells herself. "You're going to find out who that 'you' is—what that 'you' is—and you're going to . . . *occupy* . . . that *space* . . . if it kills you." And, as "Occupant" suggests, it did kill some part of her. Nevelson is as unrepentant onstage as she was in life. "You can use the word 'self-centered,' if you wish," she told an interviewer in 1972, with a tartness that Albee clearly relishes in his homage. "Who am I going to center myself on if not on my inner self?"

The play makes much of the two sets of sable eyelashes that Nevelson wore, both to draw attention to her eyes and to mask them; she aspired to be visible without being seen. She had, after all, a lot to hide. In a head scarf, layers of gaudy fabric, and bulky jewelry, Ruehl puts a fine shine on the rebarbative spectacle that Nevelson made of herself. A tall, handsome woman with long, tapered hands that could probably palm a basketball, she manages to suggest Nevelson's chilliness as much as her charm, her dead heart as well as the life of her mind. Her characterization gives the illusion of substance to a vehicle that is really a graceful finger exercise. Albee writes a tight, limpid sentence with just enough wrinkle in it to give the flourish of the poetic. When Nevelson is asked, for instance, whether she wanted another child after her botched first stab at motherhood, he has her answer, "I didn't know who I was yet, so there's no hand for anybody to take hold of." When Nevelson did finally find her talent, she wanted only to hold on to herself. ♦

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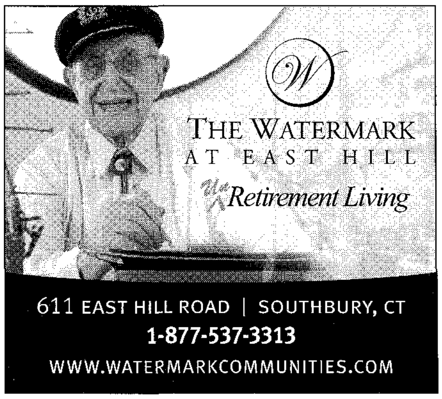
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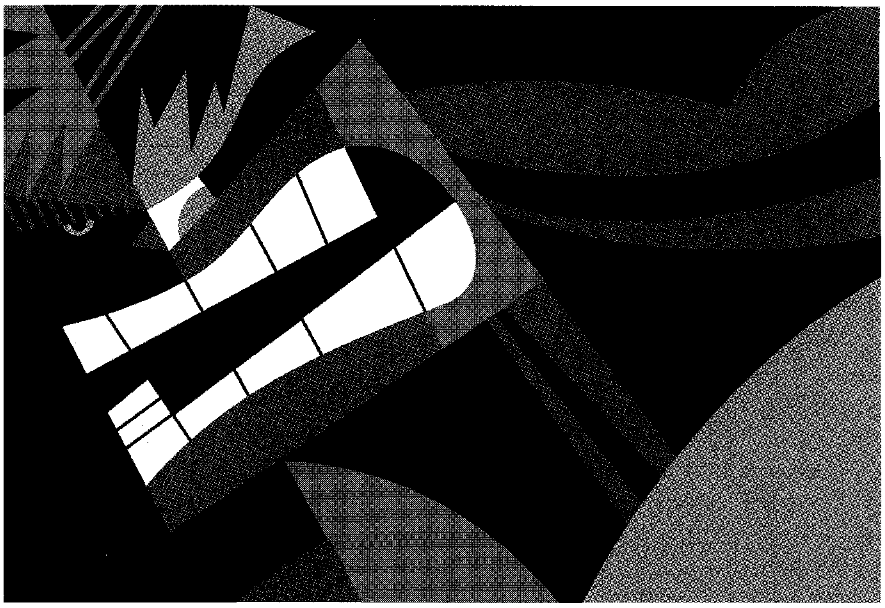
THE CURRENT CINEMA

BULGES

"The Incredible Hulk" and "You Don't Mess with the Zohan."

BY DAVID DENBY

"The Incredible Hulk" picks up the story of Bruce Banner—the guy with anger-management problems—some five years after the end of his tantrummy misadventures in "Hulk." As Bruce, Edward Norton has taken over for Eric Bana, and Louis Leterrier has replaced Ang Lee as director, but Bruce's situation remains the same—his blood is infected with gamma radiation, or something or other, making it unwise for his emotions to expand beyond a snit. When seriously provoked, Bruce grows exponentially, his muscles swelling under the skin, his feet bursting through his shoes, his forehead widening to the size of Washington's brow on Mt. Rushmore. He becomes fifteen feet or so of lime-green power, with the temperament of a nasty five-year-old boy—he likes to throw things. Embarrassed by his own might, Bruce, in his normal state, has buried himself in a soft-drink bottling plant near Tavares Bastos, a teeming favela outside Rio de Janeiro. He works with an anger-control guru, who whams him across the face and then tells him to breathe deeply to control his feelings. The most repressed man on earth, he leads a forlorn and shadowy life, and Edward Norton, exercising his talent for melancholy withdrawal and pained self-discipline, makes him a touching, haunted figure. Bruce is in hiding from General Ross (William Hurt), of the Army, who wants to use Bruce's genes to manufacture scores of hulking human weapons. The trouble is, the way the movie presents Bruce, the General's project never makes much sense: when Bruce is miffed, he goes on a rampage and attacks anything within range. A multitude of Bruces could, I suppose, rip out Iranian nuclear installations, but they would rip out American military bases, too. Bruce enlarged is not controllable—that's why he scares people and himself. Bereft and friendless, he can't even have sex; his rapidly beating heart would turn him into a monster. His girlfriend and lab partner back home (Liv Tyler) doesn't know where he is.



The Hulk: fifteen feet of lime-green power, with the temperament of a nasty child.

PABLO LOBATO

Louis Leterrier ("The Transporter") doesn't try for poetry, as Ang Lee did (with mixed success), but Leterrier is marginally better than Lee at the summer-action-spectacle side of the Hulk story. General Ross gathers a commando team, including a vengeful bloke played by Tim Roth (of the crooked smile), and, as the team tracks Bruce down in Brazil, Leterrier stages a chase with a moving camera through narrow alleys. It's nothing we haven't seen done better before (by Paul Greengrass in the recent "Bourne Ultimatum," for instance), but it's good enough as kinetic entertainment. When Bruce becomes a monster, Leterrier and his C.G.I. people perform competently but without much imagination or flair: the Hulk roars and thrashes about and tears a military vehicle in half and then flings the fragments at a helicopter or a tank or anything else threatening him. The effects are grand and violent but, again, familiar. We've become abysmally jaded, we moviegoers. Digital spectacle is both too much and too little, and it's beginning to put some of us in a funk of disappointment and boredom. When you've seen one half-ton piece of metal flung through the air, you've seen them all.

And the truth is that, in any version, the Hulk is a dull beast. He's just a big angry guy; he has no soul, no oddities, no vulnerable or tender spots. King Kong and Frankenstein's monster are Byron and Keats in comparison with the Hulk, as I wrote when Ang Lee's version came out. And by now the timidity and even hypocrisy of the entire conception have become depressing. After all, for many of us, rage, while it lasts, is exhilarating as well as scary—a wild ride that seems to fuel itself and go faster until it suddenly collapses. Bruce erupts and destroys things—what could be more fun for an overgrown boy? Isn't it a thrill to be that strong? And, since he's impacted sexually, destroying things is the only release he's going to get. If he were ambivalent about the powers that lie within him—drawn to the excitement but also repelled by it—the tension for the audience might be overwhelming, because Bruce's mixed emotions would speak to the way we're tempted and repelled by anger, too. But the movie presents Bruce conventionally, as a man who has a strange, hateful disease that he can't get rid of. Bruce is merely disgusted by his situation (there's no make-my-day gleam in his eye as he approaches fury), and, afterward, he's just exhausted and empty. If he could only describe for us the wild pleasure he feels—the allure of the forbidden struggling against morality and sense—then the movie would transcend its comic-book origins and become a kind of tragic fable of id released and regretfully tamed. But Bruce is just a decent, sorrowful guy who's been dealt a bad hand, and, for all Norton's skill, we lose interest in him.

"You Don't Mess with the Zohan" is an obscene, ridiculous, and occasionally very funny movie, and if it ever gets to the Middle East it will roil the falafel tables on both sides of the Arab-Israeli divide. I'm not sure the picture won't panic the Middle West as well. Written by Judd Apatow, Adam Sandler, and Robert Smigel, and directed by Dennis Dugan, the auteur of "I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry," the movie is about a fabulous Israeli counter-terrorism agent (Sandler) who has a bulging crotch and dangerous hands (he karate-chops Palestinian machine guns into carrot sticks). Zohan, however, has had enough of war and "the hate." After an epic contest with his nemesis—an extremist Palestinian warrior known as Phantom (John Turturro)—Zohan fakes his own death, leaves the tumultuous Promised Land for the slightly less crazy New World, and settles in a mixed Arab and Israeli neighborhood in New York, where he works in a Palestinian-owned beauty salon, cutting hair. Making the "smooth and silky," it turns out, is all he has ever wanted to do. He cuts, he styles, and he sleeps with the store's elderly clientele, who line up on the sidewalk outside for their appointments with the Israeli wonder. Forty years ago, in "The Producers," Zero Mostel slept with rich old ladies in order to raise money for a Broadway show; Zohan labors on behalf of a corner store, demonstrating, once again, that small business is the soul of the American economy. The movie is agitated into being by Sandler's pelvis, which constantly undulates, like an industrial washing machine. As for Turturro's Phantom, he's not waiting for martyrdom and the seventy-two virgins; he sleeps with a harem of terrorist groupies while nurturing his own commercial longings for a shoe store in faraway America. Eventually, the two men, with armies of émigrés behind them, meet somewhere in the battle zone of lower Manhattan, where the real struggle is fought against a boastful Trumpian real-estate developer, and victory is measured in frontage rather than in fronts.

"Zohan" burlesques a host of solemn and bloodstained issues, turning warriors into sex hustlers and would-be Rotarians. The movie propels many liquid substances (mousse, etc.) into the air; it's crude beyond belief, and it includes knowing jokes about the way Israelis speak English and make a living in America—jokes that may puzzle anyone west of the Monongahela. When Zohan needs to rush from neighborhood to neighborhood, he rides on the top of a Moishe's moving van, then hops to another moving van—it's the Jewish express train. The movie also devotes detailed attention to the curious procedures of Jewish-owned electronics stores, which attract customers with allegedly rock-bottom prices while rapidly (but perpetually) "going out of business."

In the new millennium, we seem to be getting a genre of profane, sloppily made, ethnically knowing, but good-hearted movies—pictures with aggressively liberal values proudly displayed beneath crummy jokes. As in the "Harold & Kumar" epics, "Zohan" presents America as a multifarious bazaar where gangs of enraged white males who hate everybody are the only people who don't fit in. In commercial comedy, mutual acceptance is now the hip mode of humor. Future academics will see "Zohan" as *un texte obamiste.*

This moviegoer has no trouble with lowbrow comedy. The problem with "Zohan," however, is that it's like a kid who tells you a silly joke, gets a laugh, and immediately tells the same joke again. "Zohan" invents a few things; then it repeats and repeats. When Sandler plays Ping-Pong with a grenade, or kickboxes an opponent with both feet at once, the movie teases the feats that audiences know are impossible without digital. But, as this kind of joke is staged over and over, the media irony wears off. Digital has become so omnipresent in the summer season that even spoofing it seems secondhand. "Zohan" would have been funnier if it had stayed closer to realism. In the same way, it's funny the first few times the elderly ladies come out of their sessions with Zohan, their clothes askew and their eyes glazed—as a minor outrage on sexual propriety. Zohan is presented as a saint bringing unexpected miracles into the lives of the broken-down. The hypersexed hairdresser is a satirical take on the old Warren Beatty role in "Shampoo," yet Beatty played the stud with a rather graceful chagrin. He was a little guilty about it, while Sandler just goes on and on. Does Adam Sandler, sleeping with half of New York, really think he's Yahweh's gift to women? ♦

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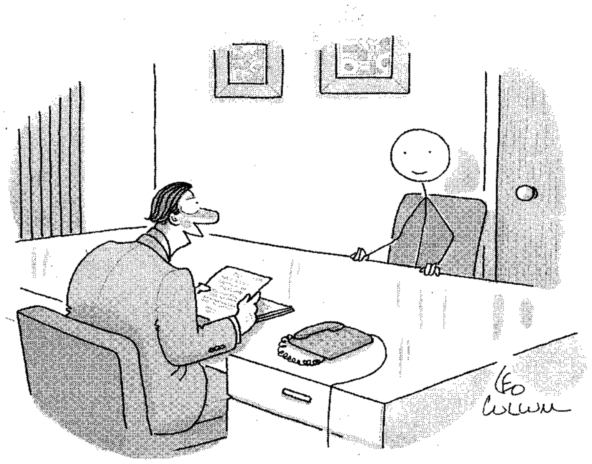
PLEASE RECYCLE THIS MAGAZINE

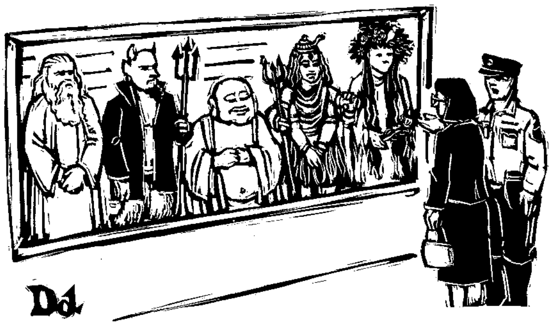
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Lee Lorenz, must be received by Sunday, June 22nd. Finalists in the June 2nd contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the July 7th & 14th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"I'm sorry, this is Tic-Tac-Toe—applications for Hangman are down the hall."
Gavrilo Gnatovich, Tucson, Ariz.



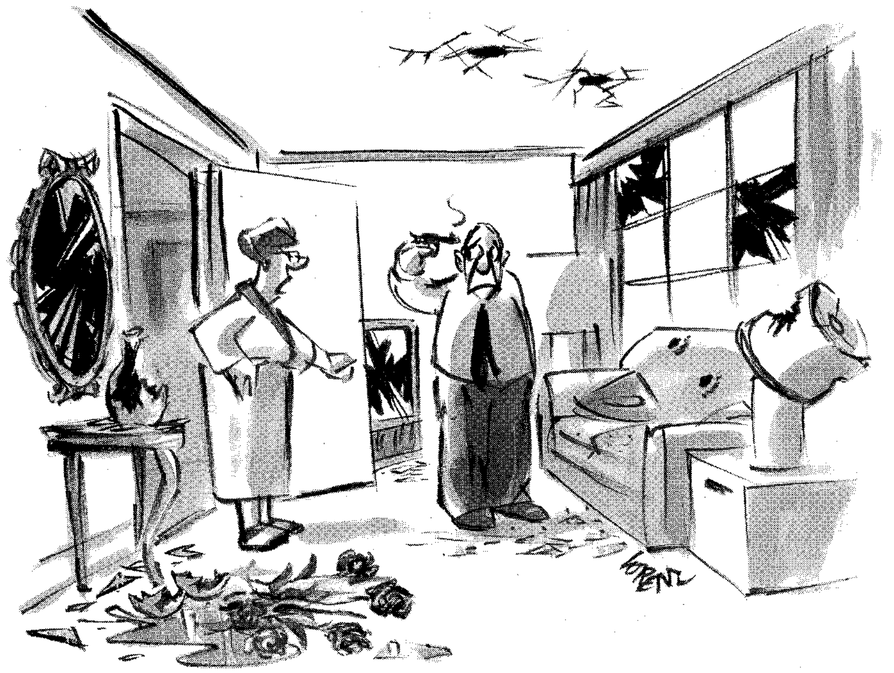
THE FINALISTS

"Will No. 3 please step forward and achieve satori."
Denis Cullinan, Jamaica, N.Y.

"It's always a problem for us when a crime is committed on Halloween."
Diane Ross Kahan, San Antonio, Texas

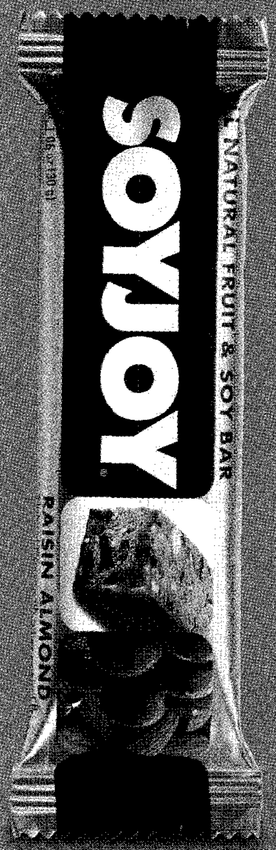
"By the way, we are not allowed to show the face or image of No. 6."
Joel Collier, Roanoke, Va.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

WHOLE SOY:
A SOURCE OF
good karma.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Sixteen?

THAT'S ONLY ONE IN DRIVING YEARS.

They may be old enough to get their driver's license, but they're still the youngest drivers on the road. There's a big difference between learning how to drive in the classroom and driving in the real world. It's called experience.

16-year-old drivers have crash rates three times higher than 17-year-olds and five times higher than 18-year-olds. How can we help our teens safely get the experience they need? **Allstate has some ideas:**

SUPPORT AND STRENGTHEN GRADUATED DRIVER LICENSING (GDL) LAWS.
They restrict driving situations that are more dangerous for teens, such as driving with multiple teen passengers or after dark. As they get older and gain more experience, their restrictions are gradually lifted.

In 1997, North Carolina implemented one of the most comprehensive GDL laws in the country. Since then it has seen a 20% decline in traffic fatalities involving 16-year-olds.

To learn about your state's GDL laws, visit Allstate.com/teen. If they aren't strong enough, ask your legislator to strengthen them.

AND IF YOU'RE A PARENT, HAVE THE DRIVING TALK.
75% of teens surveyed said their parents would be the best influence in getting them to drive more safely. The Allstate Parent-Teen Driving Contract can help start the conversation. **Contact an Allstate Agent to get a copy or visit Allstate.com/teen for the interactive contract.**

Let's use our experience to help teen drivers build theirs.

It's time to make the world a safer place to drive.
THAT'S ALLSTATE'S STAND

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Retirement

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